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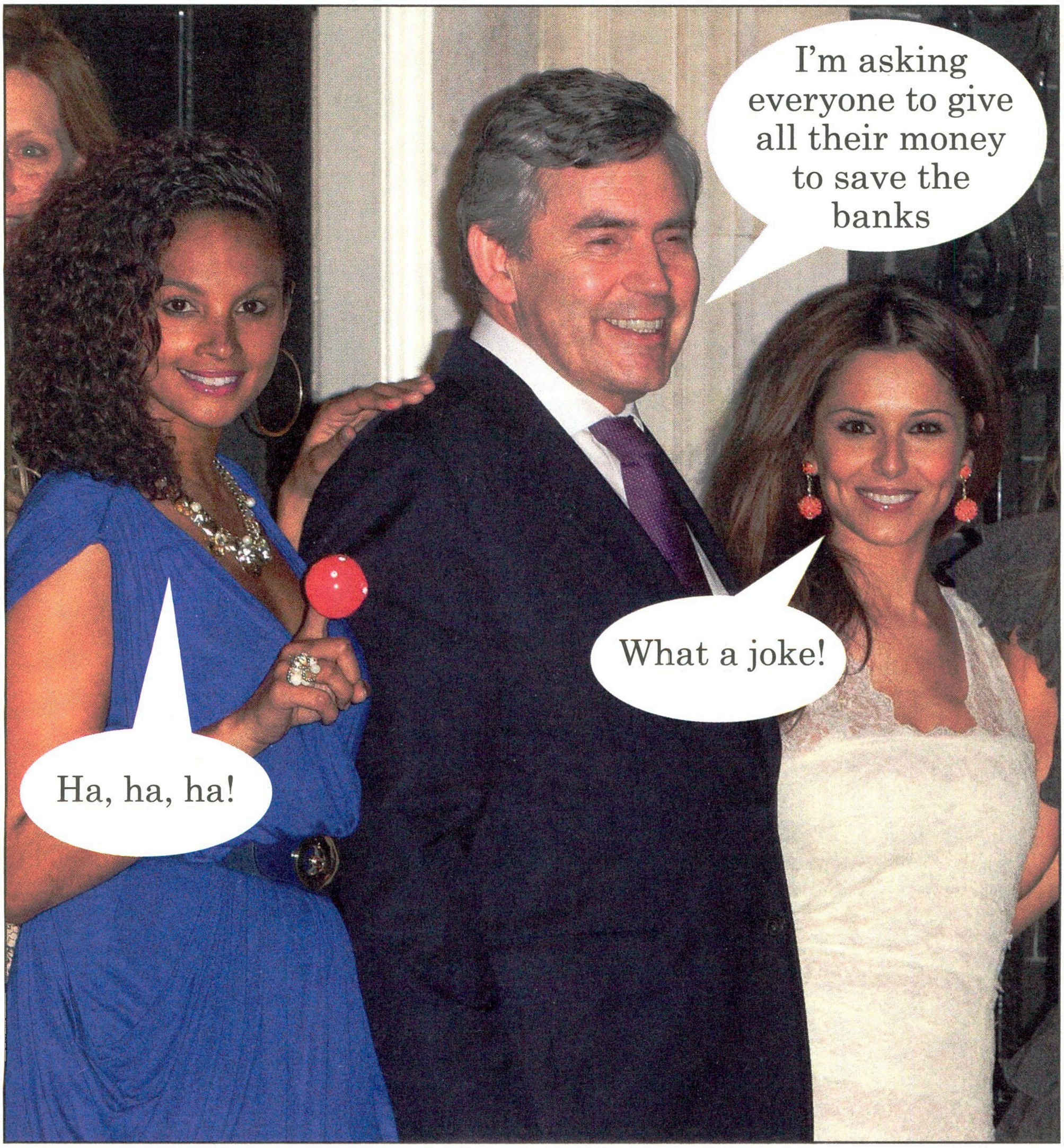

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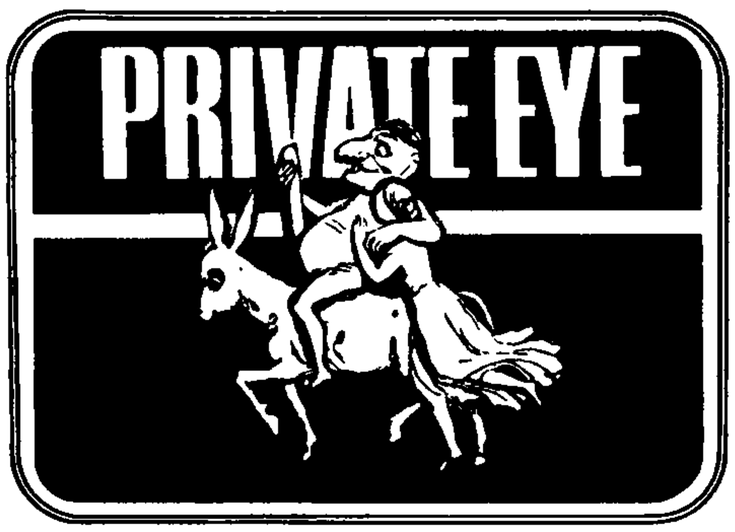

Funny for money

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CAMERON SAYS SORRY

"THE PM will in the fullness of time be watching them, but he is very busy at the moment," Downing Street told the *Mail* last week of the set of 25 "Classic American Movies" presented to Gordon Brown by Barack Obama.

He will have a nasty surprise when he gets round to it. The discs – selected by the American Film Institute at the request of the White House – are all encoded region 1, and won't work on standard British DVD players. The *Washington Times* speculated last week that "perhaps the President's choice of the DVD collection… was intended to say, 'Forget the special relationship, that's yesterday's technology'."

Utah's *Deseret Morning News*, meanwhile, had rather more practical advice: "They do make nice coasters."

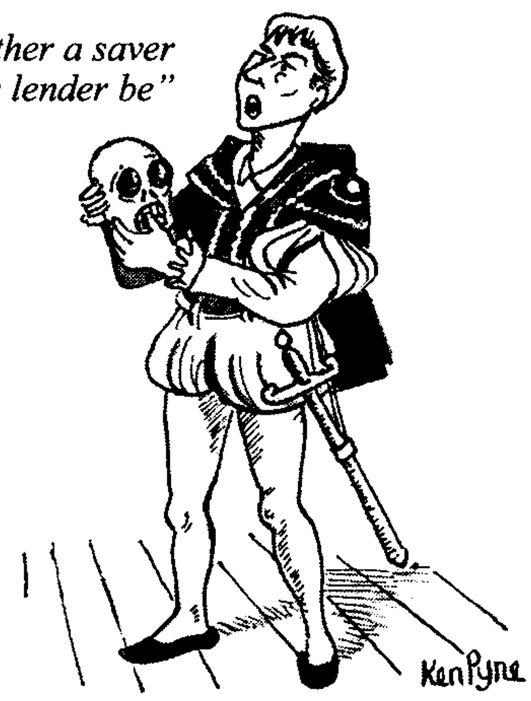
AS invitations go out for this year's British Mortgage Awards, hosted at the Park Lane Hilton, organisers are – with no sense of irony – seeking nominees for categories including "large loans broker of the year" and "best product developer".

So who is helping pay for all this jollity? Step forward event sponsors RBS Intermediary Partners and HBOS, spending taxpayers' bail-out money on prizes for "the cream of the mortgage industry"!

"It proves they had comical weapons"

Updated Shakespeare No. 37

"Neither a saver nor a lender be"



GORDON BROWN has appointed Philip Remnant to be a director of UK Financial Investments, the body which looks after the taxpayer-owned banks and where his experience advising, er, Enron will no doubt be greatly appreciated!

Remnant was previously a director of Credit Suisse First Boston, which he still advises and where he arranged the £300m credit facility for Enron to buy a London-based metals trader, renamed Enron Metals, in 2000, just as Enron was shifting from being an energy firm to a trader dicing with ever more exotic instruments.

In 2001, within a year of Remnant's deal, Enron Metals was fined £190,000 for "inadequate" compliance with trading regulations. By the next year, Enron had collapsed and the unit Remnant had helped it buy for £300m was flogged off for £99m.

Not that his association with this Enron deal has done Remnant any harm. Brown made him chairman of the Shareholder Executive in 2007, and has also put him on the board of Northern Rock. As UKFI is supposed to manage British investments in nationalized Northern Rock, Remnant's position on both boards appears open to question.

NOTHING succeeds like failure, part 94… On 1 April a new chief executive will move in at the Pension Protection Fund, the public body responsible for looking after the pension schemes of collapsed companies (set for a busy few years). His name? Alan Rubenstein.

The new boss recently walked away from the wreckage of Lehman Brothers, where he was, in the PPF's words, "responsible for establishing their pensions advisory group, which brought together Lehman Brothers equity, fixed income and investment banking services to pension funds and corporate plan sponsors". In other words, getting pension funds to invest in Lehman's products. A number, including at least two in the UK, have launched a class action against what's left of the bank in the US.

PUNISHING BANKERS

"AD 1125. In this year sent the King Henry, before Christmas, from Normandy to England, and bade that all the mint-men that were in England should be mutilated in their limbs; that was, that they should lose each of them the right hand, and their testicles beneath. This was because the man that had a pound could not lay out a penny at a market. And the Bishop Roger of Salisbury sent over all England, and bade them all that they should come to Winchester at Christmas. When they came thither, then were they taken one by one, and deprived each of the right hand and the testicles beneath. All this was done within the twelfth-night. And that was all in perfect justice, because that they had undone all the land with the great quantity of base coin that they all bought."

– The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
(thanks to reader Colin Knox).

THE last *Eye*'s revelation that Britain's most powerful newspaper owner, Daily Mail and General Trust chairman Lord Rothermere, saves a fortune in tax by being "non-domiciled", and owning his newspaper group through tax havens including Bermuda, has met with deafening silence.

The fairly significant news that a press baron whose papers take a none too indulgent line on foreigners feels a principal allegiance to another country (and *France*, of all places) has merited not a single mention in the press. This is the *omerta* effect of what the *Mail's* most famous editor David English called the "proprietors' club". All agree not to report on the others for fear of mutual destruction.

More alarming is the cover-up at HMRC, where boss Dave Hartnett pressured inspectors to drop an investigation into the bizarre arrangement under which English-born Rothermere is considered domiciled abroad while lording it over a neo-Palladian castle set in 220 acres of Wiltshire countryside. Hartnett's intervention countermanded the judgement of investigators, a high-level strategy board and government lawyers that there was an overwhelming case to overturn the Viscount's non-dom status.

Insiders report that a furious Hartnett has instigated an inquiry into how the episode was leaked – but, strangely, no inquiry into how and why he gave the press baron the sweetheart treatment in the first place.

PS: All the pre-G20 hot air on tax havens – Gordon Brown says they have "no place in this new world" – needn't worry non-doms like Rothermere. The grandstanding boils down to a series of information sharing agreements, which won't work, and in any case don't affect those using havens with full "new" Labour endorsement.

The cosy deal agreed for non-doms by Brown and Darling last year means that income kept offshore remains tax exempt no matter how many pieces of paper the G20 leaders sign. With the non-dom exemption in tact, along with protection from the taxman, there will long be a place in Rothermere's portfolio for the tax havens through which he controls his empire.

● *Slicker on Gordon's Swiss roll-over* p. 30.

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ABC

Street of Shame

MAX MOSLEY'S appearance in front of the Commons select committee inquiry into press standards and privacy last week sent the *Daily Mail* into apoplexy.

An editorial reflected that the S&M fan was guilty of "disgusting and depraved behaviour" and should not be blaming the press for his exposure.

During his evidence, Mosley singled out the behaviour of a particular newspaper that had on more than 900 occasions used a private investigator to illegally procure information from public officials, and deplored the reluctance of the relevant committee at the Press Complaints Commission to punish it accordingly.

"It was an obvious part of the *Daily Mail* culture to use this man to obtain information," he said. "Who is the editor of the *Daily Mail*? Mr Dacre. Who is the chairman of the [PCC] code committee? Mr Dacre. It would actually be funny if it wasn't such a serious matter."

For some reason, this part of the testimony went unmentioned in the *Mail*'s copious coverage.

ACCORDING to last Sunday's *Observer*, "The *Mail*'s editor-in-chief, Paul Dacre, is known to be furious about the sale of the *Standard* to Alexander Lebedev."

Not so: Dacre *wants it to be known* that he is furious, which isn't quite the same thing. In fact he spent at least two years planning to offload the *Standard*, and was at first quite content with the Lebedev deal – so relaxed, indeed, that he didn't even let it interrupt his holiday in the British Virgin Islands.

Since then, however, sales of the *Standard* have plummeted, and the new owner has turned the paper into a laughing-stock with embarrassing Maxwellian stunts such as last week's "press conference" by Lebedev and Gorby in the newsroom. Terrified that his own reputation will be besmirched by these embarrassments, Dacre has asked his PR flak Sir Nick Lloyd to spread the word that he was "furious" about the sale all along.

"WHAT a very small world it is!" the *Daily Mail* chortled on 28 February, as it revealed a "tangled web of intrigue" involving Peter Mandelson, BAA and Roland Rudd, the founder of City PR firm Finsbury.

Besides a front-page splash, two inside pages depicted the "impressive nexus of power and money", with a complicated graphic showing that "all roads lead to Finsbury". Rudd's reputation as "the fixer supreme", the *Mail* noted, "has brought on board as clients around one quarter of the FTSE-1000 companies".

Although some were named and shamed, one of the classiest of these blue-chip clients went unmentioned: Daily Mail and General Trust plc. A small world indeed!

JUST FANCY THAT!

"How 40 winks in the afternoon can raise your risk of diabetes."
– *Daily Mail*, 9 March.

"Diabetes risk 'soars with lack of sleep'."
– *Daily Mail*, 12 March.

GO ON MY, ER, SON!

IS IT too late for the organisers of the British Press Awards, now only a fortnight away, to add a prize for humbuggery beyond the call of duty in the Myerson saga?

"Does Julie Myerson really deserve all this abuse?" Lowri Turner demanded in her *Western Mail* column. "Jake Myerson is 20, not five, for goodness sake." Unlike Lowri's youngest daughter, who was barely two months old when her mother wrote in the *Guardian* about how distressed she was to have produced a "non-white" baby. The child's father – whom Lowri had given the heave-ho even before the birth – eventually had to obtain a court order to stop her mentioning the baby's name in print or using her photograph.

Still, at least Turner could see that lambasting Julie Myerson wasn't an option for a veteran family-exploiting Polly Filler. No such inhibitions for Minette Marrin in the *Sunday Times*. "Monstrous," she snorted. "A comprehensive betrayal." How dare Julie give herself permission to write about her son! "Even if he had agreed, even if she thought he had agreed, she as his mother should not have let herself… expose her own young, vulnerable and needy child."

Can this be the same Minette Marrin who in 1995 wrote about the learning difficulties of her own vulnerable and needy sister in a long piece for the *Daily Telegraph*? The sister, who had for some years been a resident of a Bristol-based charity, had no idea she was being featured. She was deeply distressed by the piece, and by a large accompanying photo of her, also used without her knowledge or permission. Minette also referred to her sister's views on sex – which led to several dodgy calls from alleged "psychiatrists" offering Ugandan therapy.

But the top award for humbuggery goes to the *Guardian*. "Since the identity of the children in Living With Teenagers is now known," it announced last week, when Julie finally owned up to having written the anonymous column, "we have removed the columns from the *Guardian* website to protect their privacy."

"Oh, he's my muse"

Shome mishtake? The reason Myerson had to stop Living With Teenagers, last June, was that her children were fed up with being teased about the column by their schoolfriends, who had rumbled them long ago. If the *Grauniad* cared two hoots about their privacy it would have removed the columns from its archive back then, as soon as it learned that their cover was blown, rather than March 2009. Or, of course, it could have protected their privacy even more effectively by not printing Myerson's drivel in the first place.

It was also the *Grauniad* which cleared several pages for an epic self-justifying screed by Jonathan Myerson explaining why he and his wife "have broken one of the most serious prohibitions facing any writer. You Do Not Write About Your Children… There is a glass-fronted box in the corner of every writer's room, protecting the real lives of their children: Smash Only in Case of Emergency." Or, as it transpired a day later, Only in Case of Weekly Cheque From the *Grauniad*.

TIM WALKER's excuse for his lacklustre performance as the *Sunday Telegraph*'s theatre critic is that he's too busy writing the Mandrake diary column as well. So what's his excuse for the shortcomings of the Mandrake diary column?

His diary sidekick Laura Roberts challenged him on the matter recently, after hearing that Walker was complaining behind her back that she "never gets any stories". "You," she pointed out to her boss, "never get any stories either." To which he replied: "Well, I am too busy with my theatre work."

HOW THEY ARE RELATED

"Social scientists at the London School of Economics wanted to discover why Britain's productivity was so much lower than many rivals, and they found the single biggest cause was our large number of family-run businesses. By definition, these businesses do not seek out the best person, they simply hand them on to their kids."

– Johann Hari, *Independent*, 14 January.

"Sir Anthony O'Reilly has advised the board of Independent News & Media plc of his intention to retire as chief executive officer… Mr Gavin O'Reilly, chief operating officer, becomes chief executive officer-designate with immediate effect and will succeed Sir Anthony upon his retirement in May."

– Press release issued by the *Independent*'s proprietor, 13 March.

MORE bloodletting at the *Independent*, where another 20 hacks were fired last week. But managing director Simon Kelner remains his usual bumptious self, dismissing requests that he make a token sacrifice by giving up his chauffeur-driven car or cutting down on his lavish lunches.

Visiting the sports department while ashen-faced hacks waited to hear which of them were for the chop, Kelner bounded merrily up to racing editor John Cobb. "I've got two hundred quid," he said. "Can you put it on a horse at Cheltenham for me?" Cobb suggested that this might not be the most tactful moment to be flashing his cash around, pointing out that £200 "is probably quite a lot of money for people who are about to lose their jobs".

Let it not be said, however, that Kelner is wholly unaware of the new austerity mood. "Times are tough," he told staff in another recent pep talk. "Even at my hotel in California last week they were saying how tough things are…"

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

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– Email from 72 Point PR Agency

"FROM today," the new *Evening Standard* editor Geordie Greig announced on 2 March, "this newspaper takes a fundamentally optimistic view of life, of London and Londoners... We shall be quick to celebrate what is good."

And what could be better than a visit to the *Standard* office by proprietor Alexander Lebedev and his mate Mikhail Gorbachev, respectively a former KGB colonel and a former general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party? Well worth celebrating with a big news story on page two last Thursday, and a picture of the Old Communists being greeted by the Old Etonian editor.

Rather like *Pravda* reporting five-year plans, *Standard* apparatchiks and commissars now translate everything into breathless hyperbole. None more so than creepy politburo hack Andrew Mullins, the managing director, who marked the glorious new dawn with this message to staff:

"Our mission is to create the pre-eminent media news brand in London. Our content will keep Londoners abreast of what matters most to them throughout the working week, most importantly in print form, continuously via web and fused synergistically, for on the spot updates, through mobile. We will transform into a perfectly formed, agile, flexible and high performance media company and to enable this to happen we will have to look deeply within ourselves and at everything we do. We will all need to change considerably, and at speed, if we are to realise our ambitions. We will be different. We have to be different."

Forward to victory!

"TAKE time out on the career ladder," trills a chirpy feature in the *Financial Times* on 12 March. "Redundancy is rarely welcome but it offers a chance to take stock of your skills, your finances and your opportunities... Breaking with the past can be healthy, creating new and unimagined possibilities, even in a downturn. This may be your last, best chance to pursue that alternative career you never thought would be open to you."

Editor Lionel Barber and his boss Dame Marjorie Scardino have spent months softening up their own hacks with cheerful guff like this, hoping to forestall a mutiny over the *FT*'s plans to axe 80 staff while freezing the pay of everyone else and asking them to work a three-day week over the summer. But the galley-slaves are now more mutinous than ever, after learning that annual profits at the FT Group actually rose last year by 13 percent, to £195m – and that Scardino herself earned £2.3m, including a £1.3m bonus. Any more twittering lectures from Dame Marje on austerity may well provoke a riot.

"BEGINNING of the end for tax havens," boomed the front page of last Saturday's *Guardian*. "In a remarkable week, Europe's secrecy jurisdictions – Liechtenstein, Andorra, Austria, Luxembourg, Jersey and Switzerland – all entered into international information sharing agreements."

While hacks at the *Grauniad* are delighted at this victory for the paper's vocal campaign against corporate tax avoidance and secrecy, it puts the newspaper's management in a curious position. Guardian Media Group and private equity giant Apax Partners jointly own the Emap business magazine empire, which they bought last year. But despite Emap being based in central London, GMG and Apax set up a new parent company in, er, Luxembourg and a string of offshore subsidiaries in the Cayman Islands. When quizzed about this set-up by the *Guardian*'s own reporters, GMG sheepishly admitted that it allowed the company to avoid paying UK stamp duty on the purchase of Emap shares. It could also mean a big tax saving if Emap is sold on at a future date.

Apax, meanwhile, has refused to discuss the matter at all. Happily, if Luxembourg does now lift the veil of secrecy, Apax's own accounts may no longer be quite so well hidden. No doubt the *Grauniad* will be the first to rejoice.

DUCK SCOOP

WHEN Heston Blumenthal temporarily closed his Michelin three-starred restaurant, The Fat Duck, he knew he could count on a few mates to make sure that media coverage of the potentially disastrous "food poisoning scare" would be a pretty cushy experience.

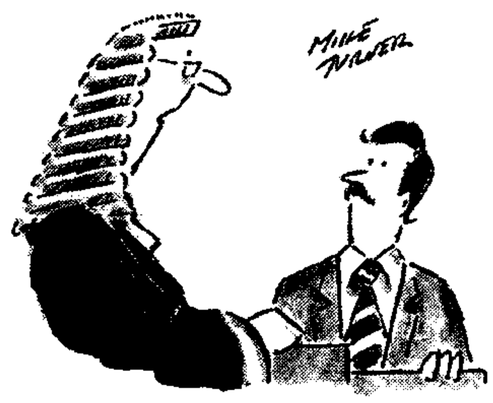
One of the first on the scene was the *Guardian*'s Matthew Fort, who has previous form with Blumenthal – he was one of the first to champion him and has made it clear that he is a chum. Cue a cringeworthy video interview as the *Guardian*'s food editor lobbed such probing questions as: "So you decided to close the restaurant. What else is going on?" For the best part of six minutes the molecular chef was allowed to rabbit on about non-specific viruses and how he didn't want any customer to get as much as a headache from his food.

Other food critics and writers also failed to show much investigative interest in what is arguably one of the biggest food stories in years. Oliver Wheeler of Fraud (whoops, Freud) Communications, another old friend, who volunteered the services of the company's corporate crisis management team, must have been delighted with the compliant reporting. The overwhelming message was that the closure of the Fat Duck was an act of unprecedented culinary bravery.

No one yet knows what caused The Fat Duck health scare but Blumenthal has a reputation for telling diners to effectively bog off if they dare to complain. On this occasion, even though diners began reporting ill-effects at the start of February, the hygiene safety specialist Food Alert was not called in until the 12th and the restaurant did not shut down until the 24th. The Fat Duck carried on serving up its £130 a head tasting menu, fully aware that there was a very strong possibility of diners remembering their meals at the world's second best restaurant for all the wrong reasons.

Aberdeen University's Professor Hugh Pennington describes Blumenthal's talk of a non-specific virus as pure tosh. "There is no such thing as a non-specific virus and he should know better than to say something like that." Foodies have also raised concerns for some time that chefs like Ferran Adria at el Bulli and Heston Blumenthal are messing around with the very structures of food with untested and unknown consequences.

Last week the Health Protection Agency gave the okay for The Fat Duck to reopen as investigations continue and fans of snail porridge are once again eagerly dining there. Meanwhile, some diners who emptied wallets and stomachs courtesy of The Fat Duck have yet to hear a word from the great man or his management, let alone read any meaningful analysis from the media.



"Without wishing to appear judgemental..."

IS THERE no limit to the paranormal powers of Virginia Wheeler, the *Sun* hack who pulled off an exclusive in-flight interview with Gary Glitter last year even though she was sitting many rows in front of the shamed pop perv and none of the other hacks on the plane saw him speak to her at all?

Over the past few weeks Virginia has reported seeing Jade Goody emerge from various places – home, hospitals, etc. This has raised a few eyebrows in Wapping as during that time Wheeler never left the plant. Other reporters – Veronica Lorraine, Antonella Lazzeri – were door-stepping the unfortunate Goody, working up to 14-hour shifts, only to see their by-lines mysteriously vanish and Wheeler's appear in their stead.

Why? Only *Sun* news editor Chris Pharo can answer that question.

NO ONE should doubt the *Sun*'s commitment to the green cause after it reported with awestruck admiration recently: "Telly thriller *24* has become the first-ever carbon-neutral show on the small screen.

"The programme slashed emissions from production by a massive 43 percent... Twentieth Century Fox chief Dana Walden declared: 'This show will serve as a model to the industry of how we can bring television production into the 21st century and reduce Hollywood's carbon footprint'."

There are three important facts to bear in mind. The first is that Twentieth Century Fox is owned by News Corp, which also owns News International, publisher of the *Sun*. The second is that the *Sun* story reads almost word-for-word like the press release that went up on the News International corporate website the day before. The final point is that NI chief executive James Murdoch is very environmentally friendly – and that weirdo *Sun* editor Rebekah Wade is desperate to ingratiate herself in the hope of landing his job when the Digger's son moves on to higher things at News Corp.

Obamaballs

"KBC BUSINESS CAPITAL SAYS 'YES WE CAN': KBC Business Capital, the specialist Asset Based Lending subsidiary of Belgian banking group KBC Bank, recently completed the re-financing of one of the UK's leading providers of canned food products to the food service and retail sectors..." – ***Press Release by Asset Based Finance Association***

"'Yes We Can!' Says UK Interactive Agency Type 3 as it Expands into US Market." – ***Press release***

"BUCKIE URGED TO SAY 'YES WE CAN': Businesses in Buckie are being urged to use 'Obama power' to help the local community regenerate and access thousands of pounds in funding... Local businessman Jim Johnston said, 'It would be disappointing if Forres, Keith and Lossiemouth had everything they needed in two or three years and Buckie had received nothing.'" – ***The Northern Scot and Moray and Nairn Express***

"Yes we can. US President Barack Obama popularized this phrase... I have spent many years preaching my own version of 'Yes we can' when it comes to economic development in New Brunswick." – ***New Brunswick Business Journal***

"MPs EXPENSES: YES WE CAN!"

– ***Headline, Liberal Democrat Voice***

"In the words of new US president Barack Obama, 'Yes we can'. With 10 games left to play this season Norwich City can still beat the drop." – ***Norwich Evening News***

President Obama's speech writers

WHO is the wise soul who advised Lord Mandelson to part-privatise the Post Office?

Step forward businessman Richard Hooper, whose report recommending a partial sale, delivered just before Christmas, wasn't the first job he has done for the government. Hooper was deputy chairman of the Ofcom regulatory board from 2002–05 – but, rather more disastrously, he was also a non-executive director of the fiasco that was UK eUniversities Worldwide (see *Eyes passim*).

UkeU was a drive to launch an international online university service based on British universities. But it flopped spectacularly in 2004 when only 900 students registered instead of the 5,000 it had hoped to recruit, and taxpayers were left with a £50m bill.

When a select committee of MPs examined the flop, it concluded that the main reasons for failure were a "distinct lack of marketing" and mistakes with the technology. The MPs also complained loudly that "bonuses paid to senior staff were wholly unacceptable and morally indefensible". They argued: "The non-executive directors who approved these bonuses through the remuneration committee cannot escape criticism." Hooper was one of the non-execs who approved the indefensible bonuses.

No wonder references to Hooper's role at UkeU seem to be few and far between these days in government circles.

ONLINE snooping firm Phorm is an "interesting and innovative business", communications minister Lord Carter told the business and enterprise committee last week. But there's mounting opposition to the use of "deep packet inspection" technology to target adverts based on users' web-browsing habits (*Eyes passim*).

Phorm's American equivalent, a company called NebuAd, was the subject of a probe by the US Congress and has now been abandoned. The inquiry found that – like BT with Phorm – communications firms had tested the technology on web users without telling them. Facing accusations of illegal wire-tapping, NebuAd's customers lost their enthusiasm for the project.

At a House of Lords discussion last week, web inventor Tim Berners-Lee said Phorm's technology was equivalent to "opening a person's mail" and called for an end to web snooping. But the government's response has so far been so feeble that in February the EU threatened to take "formal action if the UK authorities do not provide a satisfactory response" to protect citizens' privacy.

THE NEWS that Conservative frontbencher Mark Lancaster has parted company with the mother of his four-month-old daughter, Amanda Evans, may have disappointed his constituents in North East Milton Keynes, coming as it does so soon after his separation from his wife in 2007.

But the details of the split, splashed all over the *Mirror* and the *Daily Mail* complete with copious photographs and quotes from "friends of Miss Evans" on how she was "heartbroken and bitter" after moving out of their "£750,000 family home", shocked no one more than her colleagues at the *News of the World*.

Prior to going on maternity leave last October, hackette Evans specialised in such tales as "Dubai romper's wife-swap bride", "Brat trick Gabby puts 3 girls in club" and "Rat Andy kicks out stolen lover". The failure of "Love rat Tory boots out blonde lover and their tiny tot" to appear as a *Screws* exclusive has not gone down well in Wapping.

CALLED TO ORDURE

POLITICIANS lecture the rest of us about cutting back while they themselves continue to set up money-burning bodies with abandon. The latest blithe extravagance is a decision to create seven all-Labour regional select committees – all-Labour because no one else is prepared to join such pointless talking shops.

MPs also voted to pay the bloke who runs the new Commons allowances committee (purpose: to stop unjustified waste). Previous counterparts of this post have gone unpaid for years. But now it is deemed essential to bung the chairman an extra £14,000 a year. Credit crunch, what credit crunch?

Labour whips were out in force for both decisions, despite a convention that party politics be kept out of committee-forming discussions. Whips love new committees because committees mean freebies and freebies mean having leverage over venal backbenchers. Whips, you see, get to decide who sits on select committees. "Do what we tell you, Jones, and we'll make sure you sit on that shiny new committee – the one with the free trips to the regions, smart hotels, slap-up dinners, minibars, etc." "Don't mind if I do."

The new regional select committees, which will cost around £10m over the course of a parliament, are fiercely opposed by the Tories and Lib Dems who reckon MPs already have far too many select committees to man. The existing ones are often so badly attended they struggle to be quorate.

Nominally, Harriet Harman – or, more likely, Labour chief whip Nick Brown – has insisted on the seven committees being set up to scrutinise the public money spent by regional development associations. Such spending is already monitored, however, by departmental select committees.

Shadow Commons leader Alan Duncan called the seven new bodies "a job creation scheme for Labour members" who wanted to "go off on jollies". However, there was such a shortage of qualified personnel that another convention has had to be broken: the committees will include parliamentary private secretaries; MPs who are ministerial aides and so part of the government. There is therefore the absurd possibility of ministers being dragged before these committees to be quizzed by their own gofers. Don't expect the questions to be too tricky!

Government supporters said these aides could always step aside from a committee session pleading conflict of interest. But the Lib Dems' David Heath noted that the north-east regional select committee will have five members (all Labour, naturally) of whom four are ministerial aides. If they all have to duck out owing to a conflict of interest, the committee will be down to one.

When it came to paying the chairman of the allowances committee, Commons deputy leader Chris Bryant tried to glide over the matter, saying he hoped it would be agreed "with little further ado". So it would have been had Labour MP Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) and a couple of others not protested. Mackinlay said that some 160 MPs are now on some form of official top-up on their basic parliamentary wage. "It has to stop at some stage," he bawled despairingly. Bryant looked indignant.

Hugo Swire (Con, E Devon) was also on the side of the angels, saying the proposal was badly timed, at the very least, given tabloid press accusations that MPs had "noses in the trough". David Heath said that "the intention behind the allowances committee is to reduce the costs to the House, so it is a little odd that the very first action is to add another salary to those costs". Some, he said, "might see that as ironic".

No, mate. They might just see it as typical greed by a gang of increasingly desperate Labour donkeys filling their nosebags while they still can.

'Gavel Basher'

HOW DOES Capita plan to improve its transport performance, which suffered such a setback when it lost the £60m-a-year London congestion charge contract in 2007?

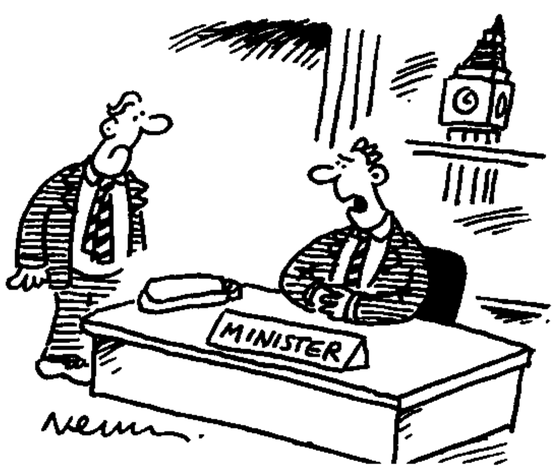
Government transport contracts are important to Crapita. It also has a £22m contract running computers for the DVLA and several consultancy contracts with the Department for Transport.

Luckily, then, this month Capita is hiring Sir David Rowlands, until last year permanent secretary at the Department for Transport.

THE Olympic Delivery Authority has announced a shortlist of five contractors who will bid for the ludicrously overpriced £1bn athletes village.

One of the five, Ardmore Construction, has on its board one Steve "Shagger" Norris, who also happens to be on the board of the London Development Authority... which has a fiduciary responsibility for the cost of the Games.

Triathlons all round!



"That was no lady, that was my research assistant/diary secretary/ constituency organiser"

HIGH PRINCIPALS

LIVERPOOL

University is planning to abandon the study of politics, communication, philosophy and statistics, saying the four departments' research isn't up to scratch.

All four departments, which scored less than four stars in the recent national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), are being considered for closure by the university's senate after failing to pull in the top level of research funding.

The announcement is a nightmare for current students, especially first years, who fear that academic staff will soon start looking for work elsewhere, leaving them with a tiny rump of a department in which to finish their studies. Meanwhile lecturers say that dumping a department because of its research grade ignores the quality of teaching and the importance to the strength of the university of offering a full range of key subjects.

A further five departments – civil engineering, cancer studies, dentistry, American studies and sociology – are also facing reviews thanks to their research output. The senate voted last week not to withdraw the closure plans put forward by managers and decide on them later in the year.

Shadow skills secretary David Willetts blamed the closure of these "well-respected departments" on the government's funding settlement, arguing that universities such as Liverpool "are being forced to close departments because they no longer have the money". But had Willetts done his homework? Liverpool was actually a big winner in the latest RAE and got a whopping 8 percent rise in its grant allocation from the Higher Education Funding Council (Hefce) for next year.

MAN IN THE EYE

SIR PAUL JUDGE

IS THERE a more energetic couple in the land than Sir Paul and Lady Judge? She, as Eye readers will know, is the Eva Peron lookalike who runs the UK Atomic Energy Authority while somehow managing to hold down about 30 other jobs and directorships. Her multi-millionaire husband, not to be outdone, has now set himself the modest challenge of cleaning up British politics.

Sir Paul's new party, the Jury Team, intends to put up a full slate of candidates for the Euro-election in June and next year's general election. It has no specific policies and no manifesto: all he asks of his prospective politicians, who will be selected by mobile-phone vote, is that "they support our principles of good governance – democracy, accountability and transparency".

Financial integrity is at the heart of it. "Every week now we see more tales of sleaze emanating from the corridors of power," Judge wrote in the *Daily Express* last week. "In 2009 alone we have seen the cash for legislation scandal in the Lords and Jacqui Smith claiming expenses that many feel she should not have been receiving. Both of these follow in the murky footsteps trodden last year by the Wintertons, Derek Conway and others. This cannot continue."

He should know: only last December a court case brought by his ex-wife, Anne Judge, revealed his own murky footsteps. When they divorced, in 2001, she accepted that £14m should be deducted from the £29.6m estate, of which she was entitled to 38 percent, so he could fulfil a "moral obligation" to cover the losses of a charity which had invested in a failed business on his recommendation. In fact, without telling her, he used £600,000 of it to pay the charity's debt to the Inland Revenue but kept the rest.

Although the appeal judges ruled that in law she wasn't now entitled to the extra cash, they admitted to being "troubled" by his conduct. "He was presented to the court as a successful and eminent businessman," said Lord Justice Collins. "But I remain disturbed about the way in which he used the charity to fund his own enterprises while simultaneously taking advantage of gift aid, especially when coupled by the relativity with which he seemed to approach the concept of moral obligation." The outcome of the case, Collins said, was an "undeserved windfall" for Sir Paul.

Who better to champion the cause of accountability and transparency? Though he omits to mention it, this is the same Paul Judge who, as director-general of the Conservative Party in 1993, received a letter from the administrators of Asil Nadir's failed Polly Peck empire, asking him to return some of the £440,000 donated to the Tories "at Asil Nadir's behest without his ever having properly obtained proper authority from the board of directors… In the light of these facts I would urge you to return the donations to Polly Peck so that the creditors can at least obtain some small measure of compensation."

Judge replied that since the donations had been "legitimately received in good faith and with no knowledge of any irregularities" the party saw no reason to return them – even though the Tories had always promised to hand the money back if it could be shown that Nadir had obtained it improperly.

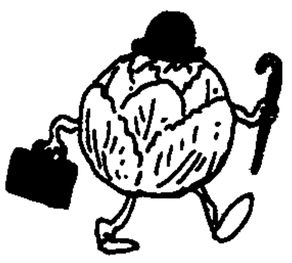
Later that year Judge sued the *Guardian* for accusing him of obstructiveness in his dealings with the Polly Peck administrators. At the libel trial, in January 1995, the *Guardian*'s counsel cited evidence from Nadir's trustees in bankruptcy which confirmed that Paul Judge and Conservative Central Office had been guilty of "substantial prevarication". The jury decided that the *Guardian* report was justified, leaving Judge with egg all over his face and a bill of more than £300,000 in costs.

Soon afterwards, during Neil Hamilton's libel action against the *Guardian*, Judge sent a confidential memo to party chairman Jeremy Hanley listing 21 Tory MPs who had accepted money from the lobbyist Ian Greer. "It is clear that the *Guardian* could generate considerable 'sleaze' by portraying these payments to the fighting funds [of] candidates as being designed to buy influence when they were re-elected," he wrote. "Despite our not being involved directly, this issue does have the potential to embarrass the party." A year later John Major gave him a knighthood for services rendered.

Now, brandishing the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of fair play, Judge vows that his "entirely non-partisan" Jury Team will slay the dragon. "The arrogance of our political class puts Britain and its democratic heritage to shame. All of the major parties are guilty." He assured Andrew Marr last week that he no longer has any connection with the Conservative Party.

But when did his conversion to non-partisanship occur? The Electoral Commission's register of political donations lists several gifts from Sir Paul to the Tories in the last few years – £4,000 in 2003, £13,000 in 2004, £10,000 in 2005. His most recent cheque to Conservative Central Office, a generous £6,000, was paid on, er, 10 October 2008.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS



WHILE happy to waste EU taxpayers' money to boost its megalomaniac building plans, the European commission has avoided the usual regulatory demands that go with them.

Thanks to an EU directive, the commission is exempt from all direct and indirect taxation, with the result that, unlike anybody else in Belgium, EU institutions need not pay any property, regional or local taxes.

Now, with plans to build a vast complex of glass towers in the centre of Brussels to create "the second most important diplomatic centre in the world", the commission can also avoid putting any contracts out to tender – a fact criticised by the court of auditors but allowed by the commission under its own regulations. Instead the commission uses "negotiated procedures" (aka backhanders).

Such procedures were used in the construction of the hideously expensive Brussels Berlaymont building (known as "Berlaymonster"). It took 13 years to complete and was recently renovated with a further €1bn or so of taxpayers' money – but is still not large enough, it seems, to house the growing number of Eurocrats. The new project is expected to take a further 15 years to complete.

TO MAKE sure the commission's exploits are not too open to public scrutiny, Eurocrats recently proposed to "improve access to documents" by, er, keeping them secret.

Swedish justice minister Beatrice Ask condemned the proposal to restrict public access to entire categories of documents unless they appeared in a register. And the proposal was also condemned by MEPs, who called for the commission to make all its documents available on a central website. Er, but that would be the same MEPs who have proposed a new version of the transparency law – to create an "EU classified" category in which documents that would "harm the interests of the European Union or member states" would be kept secret from the public for 30 years. Oh, and the same MEPs (excluding the liberal ALDE party) who have voted to keep their own bloated expenses secret as well!

DOUBLE-DUTCH STANDARDS

BRITAIN'S Islamist right was suddenly converted to the virtues of peace, love and understanding when the government decided to ban Dutch politician Geert Wilders from Britain.

"Racism and religious hatred should not be allowed in a multicultural, multi-faith British society," declared the Muslim Association of Britain last month. Wilders "has been an open and relentless preacher of hate," agreed the Muslim Council of Britain. "We extend our support and gratitude to the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith," added the British Muslim Forum. "The BMF, since its creation, has been outspoken in its condemnation of extremism in all forms."

As all the above organisations have links to the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami, two of the most reactionary organisations in the Muslim world, this was an astonishing U-turn. But could it last?

Much can be said about Wilders and his anti-Muslim film *Fitna* (see "Letter from The Hague", last *Eye*). But give the bouffant-haired bigot his due, he has never agitated for mass murder. The same cannot be said of Hezbollah, whose leader Hassan Nasrallah declared: "If Jews all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide."

Hezbollah's media relations officer is one Ibrahim Moussawi, who parroted his boss's hatreds when he told the *New Yorker* that Jews were "a lesion on the forehead of history". Moussawi was head of political programming at Hezbollah's Al Manar TV station, which broadcast *Diaspora*, a drama in which the Jews plan the Holocaust to make a gullible world feel sorry for them, as well as killing children and drinking their blood.

Al Manar also originated the first 9/11 conspiracy theory: Israelis had advance knowledge of the attacks; they secretly warned Jews in New York to stay away from danger but let the atrocities go ahead to turn world opinion against Muslims.

As David Toube, who investigates Islamist extremism, told the *Eye*: "Moussawi's job is not to oppose what Israel does in the West Bank, but to incite hatred against Jews."

The French and Spanish governments have banned Al Manar, but the Foreign Office and Home Office were all set to welcome Moussawi to Britain after the School of Oriental and Asian Studies invited him to teach a course on political Islam. SOAS said in a press statement that as long as he does not indulge "in any racist incitement" on the campus, then its academics can forget about his anti-semitism. On this reasoning, SOAS should invite Nick Griffin and the leaders of Combat 18 to help explain what makes the white far right tick. As long as they did not indulge "in any racist incitement" in the lecture hall, all would be fine.

When Jacqui Smith banned Wilders, foreign secretary David Miliband explained that the government could not tolerate the presence of a maker of a "hate-filled film designed to stir up religious and racial hatred". Despite the hate-filled films of Hezbollah, Labour was, however, prepared to excuse Moussawi because he was from Hezbollah's "political wing". It backed down and denied him a visa last week only after pressure from the Obama administration. As an Obama staffer told the *New York Times,* the US would like Britain to explain "the difference between the political, social and military wings of Hezbollah because we don't see the difference".

The government certainly faced no pressure from those who cheered the Wilders ban. The Muslim Association of Britain, which declared that "racism and religious hatred should not be allowed in a multicultural, multi-faith society", made no protest. The Muslim Council of Britain offered no condemnation of Smith's decision to admit Moussawi. And from the British Muslim Forum, which was so "outspoken in its condemnation of extremism in all forms", came nothing but a deafening silence.

'Ratbiter'

EYE TV

Comic Relief 2009 (BBC TV)

EVEN in the rougher parts of journalism, there has long been a consensus that two things put a celebrity beyond criticism: cancer and charity.

While it's hard to argue with the terminal illness chit, the second get-out clause is becoming increasingly problematic. If fading or disgraced stars use a fundraiser to burnish their own image, it should surely be possible to comment on the extent to which they are helping themselves without disrespect to the deserving people their ego-preening may also incidentally help.

Take **Comic Relief**, Richard Curtis's well-meaning but frequently emetic attempt to make up for the fact that his movies depict a world containing only rich white people. In advance of this year's appeal, the organisers had expressed concern about asking the British people to reach into their pockets for others during a global recession, but this turned out to be the least of the problems. The public stumped up record sums, which either means Robert Peston has exaggerated the extent of the financial damage or people are genuinely, touchingly decent.

If it's the latter, they deserve better entertainment than they were given in exchange for such generosity. There has always been an uneasy feeling that, for all the money and awareness it may have raised, Comic Relief is really an exercise in distracting attention from the massive fees these stars earn from the BBC at other times of the year, or in making viewers feel better about some of the corporation's more rebarbative on-screen personalities. A frequent device, for example, has been song-and-dance routines aimed at showing what fun people the more dour and humourless newscasters really are.

This year, for whatever reason, we were at least spared Huw Edwards and Gavin Esler with toppers and canes. But, even so, most of the energy seemed to be directed towards saving the careers of the well-fed in Britain rather than the starving in Africa. Indeed, the major aim of the evening often seemed to be to make viewers think that certain disgraced presenters are big-hearted rather than big-headed.

With grim inevitability, segments lasting several hours begged the audience to dig deep into their reserves of tolerance to help Jonathan, a 48-year-old dying from a sick joke, who desperately needed to be seen as a caring and charitable person live in peak-time if he is to be around on his Friday-night chat show by this time next year.

Ross's sickeningly creepy new shtick, oozing sincerity and responsibility, most resembled a very bad impression of Hughie Green. His careful blankness when an actress who has slipped on the floor talks about "being a bit slippery down there" is almost more nauseating than the previous double-entendres would have been.

The BBC's cynicism in allowing him to use this protected arena as part of his rehabilitation exercise was exacerbated by also extending the armour of good causes to the only broadcaster who attracts more complaints to Ofcom and from tabloids than Wossy. Sending Chris Moyles up Kilimanjaro, where he lost a couple of stone (cue gags about the "breakfast show") and made all the right noises about feeding *liddle chillrun*, must be worth a few points in the court of public opinion next time he breaks a few editorial guidelines on his Radio 1 show. Corden and Horne, at the end of a week in which they had been eviscerated by critics for their babyish sketch show and witless lesbian killers movie, were also handed a chance to show their softer, vulnerable sides.

Another wily manoeuvre is to use the special circumstances of this big-hearted broadcast to get on to the BBC presenters who would otherwise be contractually tied to ITV. So Ant and Dec, who could also use a chance to show what smashing guys they are after being criticised for their role in the ITV phone-in fleecings, were given a special dispensation by their commercial paymasters to roam around the country being kind to sick kids.

It was these solemn editorial sections which, rather than the credit crunch, turned out to be the programme's real problem. The official line over the years has been that the politics of aid for Africa – the question of how much of the money raised reaches its intended targets – is irrelevant as long as some good is done.

But, following the decision at the highest editorial level that an appeal for Gaza could not be broadcast without the risk of political contamination, the cheerful avoidance of the realities of Africa begins to seem highly contentious.

In the interests of balance, should the little films of comedians gazing tenderly at emaciated babies really not be balanced with reports in which the continent's dictators and tyrants thank the British public for the palaces and guns that have been bought with diverted kindnesses? In the interests of full editorial disclosure, might hosts David Tennant and Davina McCall – bouncing around the studio like kids' TV hosts – not have pointed out that the record-breaking amounts raised will actually buy less aid than in previous years because of the weakness of the pound?

Such questions need to be asked. Charity – whatever the amounts raised – should not be a free pass from criticism.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

IN NOVEMBER 2007 BBC News announced that it had to make 108 journalists redundant to meet its self-imposed "Value for Money" cost-cutting targets. One department based at White City shed eight senior and broadcast journalist posts from its radio current affairs unit.

Now the same department has announced that it has recruited four senior staff to join the four other broadcast journalists it is also in the process of "boarding" (interviewing), creating eight new posts in total. Some of these new jobs are the result of promotions within the department. But that process has forced them to hire new researchers and broadcast assistants to make up for the shortfall.

LAST November, following the Jonathan Ross/Russell Brand debacle, the *Eye* highlighted the complicated web of relationships between the BBC, the presenters, their self-owned production companies and agents.

Brand's agent John Noel ran his production company, Vanity Projects, which made his Radio 2 show, while Ross's agent Addison Creswell not only executive-produced his BBC1 chat show but went one better by also owning the company which made *Live At The Apollo,* the programme which during Ross's suspension filled his Friday night slot with stand-up turns from a number of other Cresswell clients (see *Eyes* 1223 and 1224).

Four months on, the corporation has leapt into action with new rules. Not only are "on-air talent" now banned from executive producing their own shows, but "the executive producer role on an independent production can also not be undertaken by an agent/agency employee if the talent that the agent/agency represents is appearing in the programme."

Hang on though – what's this in the small print? A get-out clause for programmes "exceptionally, where the BBC agrees that it is essential for the on-screen talent's agent to carry out the executive producer role." The only such exception the corporation has so far discovered is… Addison Cresswell, who will continue to be executive producer of *Friday Night With Jonathan Ross*!

There is also a slightly peculiar allowance for "exceptional circumstances" where it is "essential for the on-screen talent to be given an executive producer credit." Such as? Well, Ant and Dec *really* weren't happy when Michael Grade described their executive producer credits on *Saturday Night Takeaway* as "a kind of vanity credit in their case" after the phone-in scandal, and they are making increasingly loud noises about not necessarily signing up to ITV again when their current contract runs out at the end of the year…

MONTY HALLS' GREAT ESCAPE
WHERE HE FINDS OUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BEAT ONE WITH NATURE...
AND LIVE THE TOTALLY ISOLATED REMOTE LIFE...

NUMBER CRUNCHING

10 BBC World Service channels closed in recent years

9 BBC channels handed to U2 to plug their new album in recent weeks

2 Number of stories on front page of BBC news website about wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on morning of 16 March

2 Number of stories on front page of BBC news website about new album by Pet Shop Boys on morning of 16 March

WHEN ITV announced its modest £2.7bn annual loss this month, executive chairman Michael Grade received a terrific pasting – nowhere more so than in the *Times*.

"A failure to make the grade," harrumphed business editor David Wighton. "Shareholders have seen the stock fall 77 percent since Mr Grade arrived and yesterday the dividend went too. ITV needs to diversify to be secure, which means it needs to merge with a Virgin Media or an RTL."

Why has ITV been unable to diversify? Er, because Wighton's proprietor, the Dirty Digger, snapped up 18 percent of ITV shares at the end of 2006 – just as Virgin Media was about to table a merger offer and days before Grade's appointment as boss. Murdoch is still holding on to that stake, blocking ITV from merging with Virgin, RTL or anyone else, and thus preventing any serious threat to Sky's dominance of satellite TV.

But it also means the Digger, as ITV's biggest shareholder, has good reason to feel aggrieved about the stock slumping 77 per cent since he bought it – another awkward fact Wighton chose not to mention.

"WE transmit on average eight hours of originated UK drama in any one week across our channels," ITV chairman Michael Grade pointed out as he announced £65m worth of budget cuts at the company.

"That may well probably reduce to seven hours, which is hardly a decimation of our drama output." Indeed it isn't. It's considerably more – a cut of 12.5, rather than 10, percent.

FOLLOWING the story in the last *Eye* about BBC South and the dubbing of cheering football crowds over matches attended by one man and his dog, a reader contacted the *Eye* to explain.

The BBC records its Football League footage from the broadcasts of commercial suppliers who hold the TV rights (ITV or Sky). The dubbing in BBC news reports is needed to replace the unwanted ITV or Sky commentary accompanying the footage. But the reason the audio of the crowd often dwarfs the number of spectators on screen still remains a mystery.

The Watchmen

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

THE ROYAL Anglian Regiment has had to put up with a lot since its first deployment to Afghanistan during Operation Herrick 6 back in 2007.

It was a tough tour that cost nine lives, during a number of heavy contacts with the Taliban in Helmand province.

Now, on their return, they have had to put up with well-publicised protests from Islamic groups who are under the misapprehension that the Royal Anglian Regiment is at the bayonet tip of a Christian crusade against their Muslim brothers and sisters. Misled by ignorant hacks who routinely refer to them as the Royal "Anglican" Regiment, Muslim demonstrators shouted abuse about "Christian" soldiers during a recent parade.

Sky News's Eamonn Holmes is the latest culprit, but many other hacks have made the same gaffe on the BBC News channel and regional news broadcasts. Holmes managed to correct the mistake on air; most others have not. Last Friday, the *Daily Telegraph*'s Middle East expert Con Coughlin also had members of the second Battalion The Royal Anglican Regiment parading through the centre of Luton.

But it's not just the media. The British Army's own "Army in Education" website draws teachers' attention to the "organized learning activities" at the "Royal Anglican Museum". And according to the recently launched official website of the royal family, "written and managed by the Royal Household at Buckingham Palace", the Duke of Gloucester "holds honorary military appointments with the Royal Anglican Regiment" among many others.

'Squarebasher'

AD NAUSEAM

THE Department of Health's recent Change 4 Life anti-obesity posters show a dead-eyed young boy playing a computer game. The headline is "Risk an Early Death, Just Do Nothing".

Unsurprisingly, the campaign has riled the video-game industry, which feels the posters pick on it unfairly. It probably has a point: too much PlayStation can't be good for children's health, but it takes a sustained onslaught of crisps, drinks and choccie bars to make them balloon.

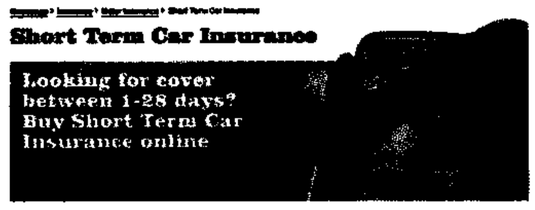
With this in mind, the video-game industry might be intrigued to learn that the Change 4 Life campaign receives £200m backing from a group called Business 4 Life. Founded by the Advertising Association, Business 4 Life is "a coalition of companies actively using marketing and communications skills as a force for good to help deliver Department of Health Change4Life and other government messaging in order to encourage healthier lifestyles".

This gallant coalition consists of, among others, Nestlé, Cadbury, Coca-Cola, Kellogg's and PepsiCo, but not a single representative from the video-game industry. It seems Business 4 Life partners have indeed "used their marketing and communications skills" – to lay the blame for childhood obesity at any door other than their own.

THE NEW ad for Aero chocolate features a skateboarder riding through the bowls and berms of a skate park filled with brown balloons. "Feel the Bubbles," runs the tagline.

Regular readers of this column may be able to predict what comes next: the ad, by JWT, is a big bubblicious bite of a YouTube clip called "Balloon Bowl" in which a skateboarder… rides through a skate park filled with balloons! The original has been viewed more than 3,000,000 times online – a fact Aero at least admits in its promo material but that may not be clear to middle-aged viewers of its TV "tribute" ad.

NORWICH UNION advertises its short-term car insurance online with an aspirational image of a little yellow Caterham 7 lightweight sportscar. There's one small problem with this – try to insure the 7 or any other Caterham vehicle via Norwich Union and you'll be told: "Unfortunately we are unable to offer insurance for this vehicle."



It's not the first insurer to advertise using what it won't insure. Actors and broadcasters were furious to find that anyone admitting to working in "entertainment or the arts" wasn't wanted as a customer by esure, despite Michael Winner's involvement in its ads.

Working on attachment in London? Looking for an easy journey to West London? (TVC, WC, MC) Look no further...
Large room in Ickenham house with BBC lady available

BBC noticeboard, Bristol

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link (BBC1)

Anne Robinson: The name of the Minister of Transport who gave his name to a type of pedestrian crossing was Leslie Hore-... what?

Contestant: Pelican.

AR: Which "C" is a former German prisoner-of-war camp which is now used as a scout hostel?

Contestant: Auschwitz.

Are You Smarter Than a Ten-Year-Old? (Sky One)

Presenter: Who in the Christian Bible was thrown into a den of lions: Samuel, Nathaniel or Daniel?

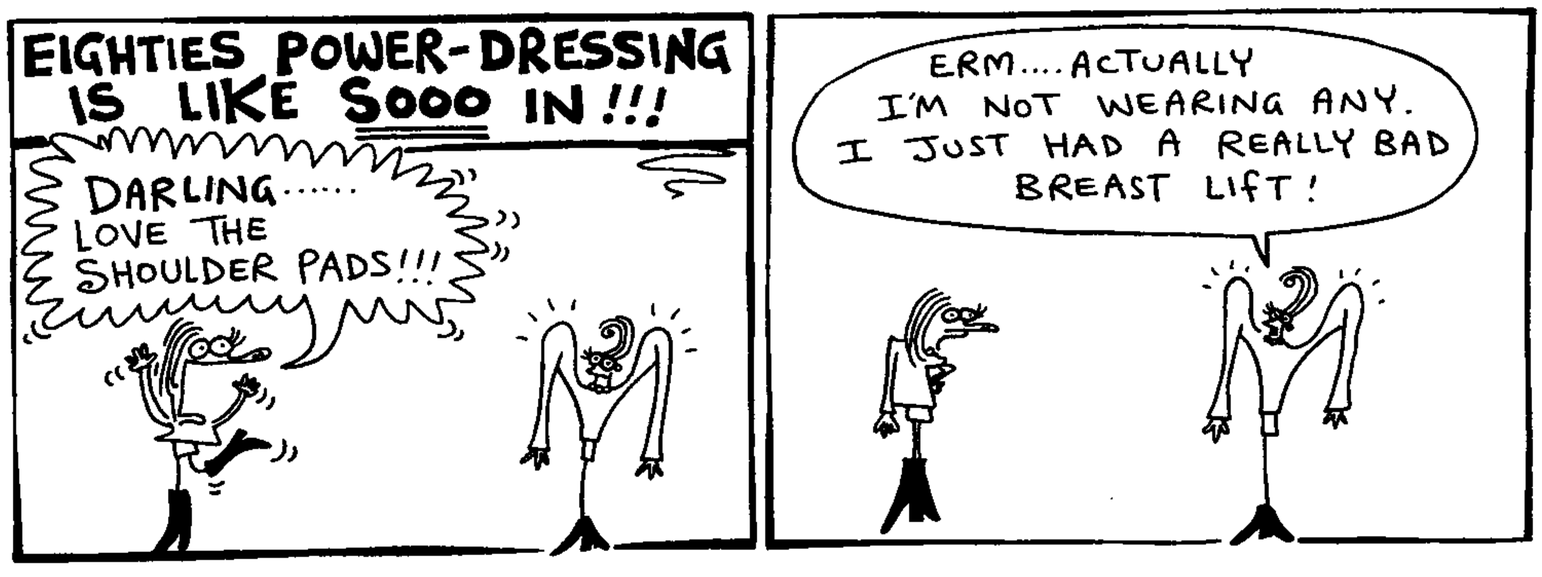
Contestant (student teacher): The first thing that came into my head was Samuel. It's not Nathaniel, I'm sure. Eeny meeny miny mo.

Presenter: You've stopped at Daniel.

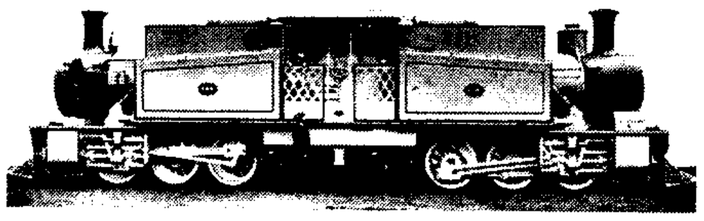
Contestant: Yes, but I'm going with Samuel.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


EIGHTIES POWER-DRESSING IS LIKE SOOO IN!!!
DARLING..... LOVE THE SHOULDER PADS!!!
ERM.... ACTUALLY I'M NOT WEARING ANY. I JUST HAD A REALLY BAD BREAST LIFT!

SIGNAL FAILURES



The weakest Thameslink

THE long-running plan to provide extra capacity on London's north-south Thameslink railway by 2000 (*sic*) is about to miss another deadline.

The Thameslink tunnel links First Capital Connect's Brighton and Bedford services, and on 22 March Southeastern trains will be diverted through it to vacate space for upgrading Blackfriars station. New trains were ordered, as most Southeastern trains can't run on the Thameslink line. However, Canadian firm Bombardier failed to deliver the trains on time, so passengers will be hundreds of seats short.

Bombardier – previously part of the disastrous Metronet tube consortium – blamed delays to components from suppliers hit by the credit crunch. But is that the whole story? A report leaked to the *Eye* says defective welds were found in components for the new trains and in samples from similar trains which have been in use for years. The defect could lead to under-floor equipment detaching and causing derailment, the report warns.

The new trains, of an established design, will be a stopgap for Thameslink passengers. The government reckons a new Thameslink train design can be procured, tested and brought into service by spring 2012. But passengers should perhaps expect those trains to maintain the "Thameslink 2000" tradition of missed deadlines (*Eyes passim* since the 1990s).

THE curse of the private rail consortium, still hampering London Underground long after Metronet crashed, is now hitting Edinburgh, where the BSC consortium is contracted to deliver a new tram system by 2011.

BSC consists of Bilfinger Berger (German), Siemens (German) and CAF (Spanish). Princes Street has been temporarily closed to traffic but city-centre track installation was halted last month because of a dispute between the city council and BSC, which complained of delays in preparatory roadworks and reportedly wanted changes which would add up to £80m to project costs.

It's not the first time BSC has argued over its contract – reminiscent of the disputes between Transport for London and the Tramtrack Croydon Ltd consortium before TfL lost patience and announced in March 2008 that it would buy out TCL for an eye-watering £98m (*Eye* 1208). Two months *after* that announcement, Edinburgh set off down the same track by appointing BSC.

AS WORLD oil supply faces a future of rising demand and prices, the latest DafT (Department for Transport) strategy is a new government company called Diesel Trains Ltd to buy 200, er, diesel-powered carriages by 2012.

Normally trains are bought by rolling-stock companies (Roscos) set up during rail privatisation but (as predicted in *Eye* 1213) financiers aren't as keen as DafT mandarins on buying trains which could run out of affordable fuel before the end of their 30-year shelf life.

The new trains will run on lines which haven't been equipped for electric trains. Privatisation and political short-termism killed serial electrification: even after last year's huge oil-price fluctuation, the government still hasn't decided whether to electrify more lines. It spent a couple of years asking train builders for a "self-powered" express train, hoping a magical new fuel would materialise. It wasn't until DafT announced its preferred bidder last month that it grudgingly admitted "self-powered" meant "diesel".

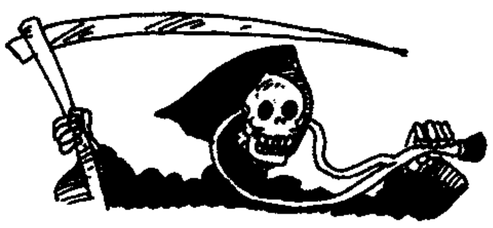
Logically Britain would electrify more lines and buy no more diesels (except some locomotives to haul long-distance electric trains in the extremities); existing diesels, displaced by electrification, would provide extra capacity or replace old trains on remaining diesel lines.

In 1996 British Rail's trains were sold for less than their true value. DafT now says it will eventually try to flog the new diesels to the private sector, which isn't keen on them. So the state will sell trains cheap again, unless the government of the day can live with the political aberration of state-owned assets for publicly funded rail services.

DTL will lease the new trains to franchisees, temporarily or permanently. Cue yet more work for consultants and bureaucrats: DafT says lease charges will be "considered" by an "independent expert" working to a remit "which will have been consulted upon in advance".

'Dr B Ching'

MEDICINE BALLS



Alternative views

THE Northern Irish survey that found an overwhelmingly positive response to the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in general practice (see last *Eye*) provoked a mixed response from *Eye* readers.

Joseph O'Connor was unimpressed: "Without a control group or any randomisation, the trial tells us diddly squat. What CAM treatments have in common is an opportunity for the patient to simply talk to someone and to feel that something is being done about their problem; prime opportunity for the placebo effect to kick in and something which GPs cannot currently do as a result of their heavy workloads.

"The website of Get Well UK, which ran the project, states that some of the benefits of CAM are the relationship with the practitioner and the opportunity for that person to take a detailed case history. Rather than referring patients to unproven therapies from those with little medical training, we should increase the number of GPs so that appointments do not need to be crammed into narrow windows and patients can feel as if they are more than walking illnesses to their doctors."

David Colquhoun, a pipe-smoking professor of pharmacology at University College, London was even more scathing: "It's not that I'm against the human side of medicine, just that I want it done honestly. To give people sugar pills accompanied by a bunch of lies is condescending, disempowering and dishonest. I can well understand that there are a lot of people whom GPs would like to get off their backs (not least in Northern Ireland, it seems) but there must be an honest way to do it. Any practice made up of GPs with half-decent critical faculties would probably never have got mixed up with a study that was so obviously incapable of telling you anything useful or new."

CAM therapies exist because people find them helpful, irrespective of whether or not their treatment is more than placebo. Marjorie Titchen is 91 and still runs a small hotel in Bournemouth. She has worked and paid tax for 75 years and is unimpressed that Bournemouth and Poole Teaching Primary Care Trust won't fund homeopathy for her osteoarthritis, even though it has done in the past and she's found it to be by far the most effective treatment she's had (and much less likely to burn a hole in her stomach than Ibuprofen).

The PCT has withdrawn treatment because "there is no scientific evidence to support it". But there's plenty of evidence to support the use of placebos and good communication skills, and there's no guarantee that Mrs Titchen would get either from a random succession of stressed GPs. Having found something that works for her, she wants to stick to it.

As the money dries up in the NHS, it's likely that complementary therapies will be squeezed out, along with care of the elderly. The best way for CAM to get NHS funding is to produce conclusive trial evidence, and the NHS now has a vast GP research database[1] that can be used for randomised observational studies of "real-life" patients, rather than the more artificial environment of controlled trials. The database is ideally suited to CAM research and overseen by Dr John Parkinson (BSc, PhD), a pharmaco-epidemiologist who also trained in traditional Chinese medicine. All that's needed is the funding. Perhaps Prince Charles could donate the profits from his Duchy Herbals' artichoke and dandelion detox tincture (£10 for 50ml).

M.D.

[1] www.gprd.com/home

ECO-GNOMICS

Fishing for information

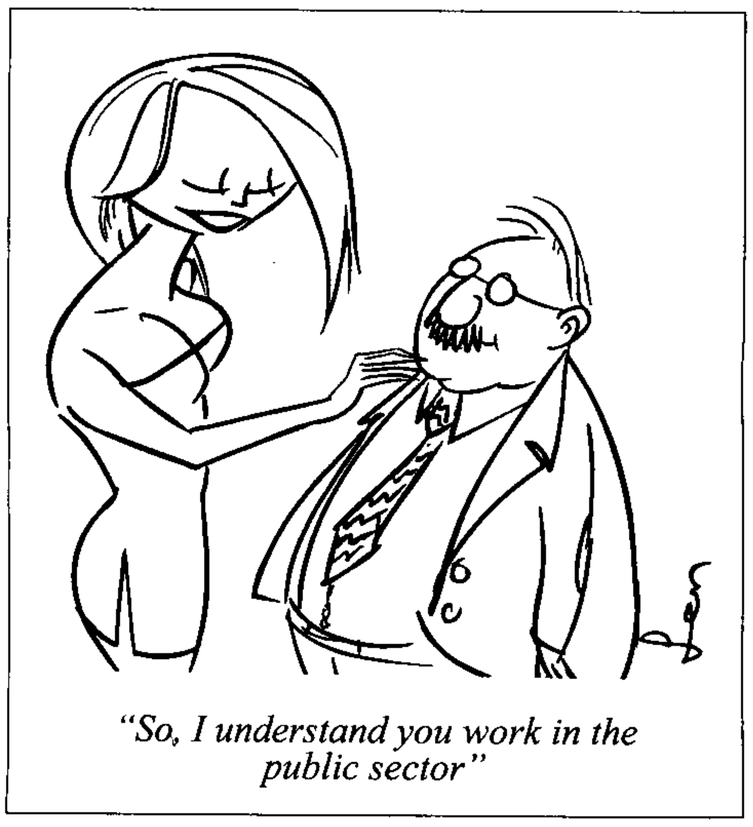
A NEW documentary about the global scandal of over-fishing, *The End of the Line*, is causing anxiety to corporations, restaurant chains and a government-funded trade body months before its official release.

Based on the book of the same name by Charles Clover, former environment editor of the *Maily Telegraph*, the film promises to name and shame some of the key culprits.

One villain is Mitsubishi, best known for cars but also responsible for rapacious over-fishing of endangered blue fin tuna stocks in the Mediterranean. The Japanese restaurant Nobu also appears in the film for its continued refusal to stop selling endangered species to its celeb customers.

The problem for the villains is that none of them has been able to get their hands on a copy of the troublesome film, which was shown in the US in January at the Sundance festival. Mitsubishi bosses are so nervous about its contents they sent a corporate representative all the way to Utah to view it, posing as a member of the festival audience.

Closer to home, the UK's Sea Fish Industry Authority, a government-appointed and subsidised body whose main funding comes from a levy on seafood products which all consumers have to pay, also felt it necessary to send someone to Sundance to report back on the film's contents prior to its launch. Presumably this is so Seafish PR folk can prepare a defence of its members when the film appears in June. With Greenpeace and other environmental groups gearing up to promote the film far and wide, expect to see some classic greenwash in the weeks ahead.



"So, I understand you work in the public sector"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

EYE TOLD YOU SO

JEREMY PAXMAN informed BBC2 viewers on 4 March that "a *Newsnight* investigation has found that [Doncaster] council managers were warned four years ago that their actions would cost children's lives... it lifts the lid on a deeply troubled local authority."

Some viewers may have experienced *déjà-vu* because the "investigation" included little that had not already appeared in *Eye* 1228 back in January, including an account by a former senior child protection manager at Doncaster, Sharon Docherty, of how the council's children's service department fell apart after a disastrous management reorganization driven by the council's then managing director, Susan Law, and its elected mayor, Martin "Mugabe" Winter (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*).

Seven children have died in Doncaster in the past three years. Last week, following Lord Laming's report into child protection and the government's announcement that it was sending in a "hit squad" to run children's services in Doncaster, Winter at last said he would quit as mayor – although not until June.

After Ms Law fell out with Winter and left Labour-controlled Donny with a substantial payoff she was appointed in September 2007 as chief exec of Tory Wokingham council in Berkshire. Alas subsequent government inspections have resulted in that council being busted down from three to two stars under the Audit Commission's "corporate assessment" and getting only one star from Ofsted for its "inadequate" arrangements for "safeguarding children and young people" – making it one of the worst authorities in the country for child protection. Ms Law was only in charge for the last six months of the relevant period, however, so no doubt the "significant weaknesses in the quality of child protection work" noted by Ofsted will be a thing of the past next time round.

SULEMAN SOME MISTAKE

A PAIR of Welsh local politicians have won considerable coverage in the local press with their efforts to develop trade with Libya.

According to the *Glamorgan Gazette*, Independent Bridgend borough councillor Peter Foley and former town mayor Suleman Hawas held "high-level exchange talks", aimed at fostering trade and cultural links, with "Libyan foreign minister Mohamed Otman".

"I couldn't believe it when he phoned and asked to meet me," said Mr Hawas, who was born in Libya but has lived in Bridgend, where he owns a kebab shop, since 1974. "I'm very grateful for people coming over, especially a man in his position." Local businesses were keen to travel to Libya on a bridge-building trip organised by his Libya-Wales Exchange organisation, he said. (Mr Hawas is described on its website as "former Lord Mayor of Bridgend". He was actually once mayor of Bridgend town council, equivalent to a parish council - not quite so grand.)

The *Gazette* was granted an interview with the "top Libyan diplomat", who observed that Bridgend was "an interesting and peaceful place". Col Gadaffi, he said, was "a very good leader who says many different things, but I know where we are going and how we are going". Indeed. Mr Otman was pictured with Messrs Hawas and Foley and a large photograph of Col. Gadaffi, after enjoying a "fish and chip lunch".

This was all terrific news for Bridgend, but possibly cause for some concern back in Tripoli. For if the man scoffing chips in Bridgend was Libya's foreign minister, who was the fellow being sworn in to that job in Tripoli the very same week? According to news agencies, it was one Mousa Kossa, former head of the country's spy network, reportedly the second most powerful man in Libya. His predecessor as foreign minister was Abdel Rahman Shalgam, who is off to New York to be ambassador to the U.N. So was there at least one impostor on the loose?

After Bridgend residents pointed out that there seemed to be a surfeit of Libyan foreign ministers, Mr Otman contacted the Media Wales website to claim that he did, indeed, work for the Libyan foreign ministry, but his English was so bad that he had probably confused hacks by saying "minister" when he meant "ministry". Yeees, ministry.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"SIR Fred Goodwin... pension... what an insult... Gordon Brown... total incompetence... Mandelson... disgrace... sleaze... cash for questions... snouts in trough... plain to see New Labour is just old Tory."

– Steve Sharp, High Peak borough councillor and Lib Dem prospective parliamentary candidate, letter to the editor, Buxton Advertiser, *5 March, page 6.*

"STEPHEN SHARP, 44, the Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate for High Peak... was arrested on Monday. In a statement Greater Manchester police said: 'A 44-year-old man has been bailed until May 5 pending further inquiries. The police investigation centres on the use of fraudulently obtained credit cards."

– News item, Buxton Advertiser, *5 March, page 3.*

● **ANOTHER story about Cllr Foley – less exotic but possibly of more relevance to the electors of Bridgend – has not featured in the local press. On 25 February the Adjudication Panel for Wales, the ethics watchdog, ruled that Cllr Foley had, in the course of his surgery in March last year, brought his office and the council into disrepute by naming a girl who had been abused by her father – thereby creating a danger that details of the case would become more widely known in the community. The panel decided to take no further action after hearing that he had apologized. So that's all right, then.**

"I got this little Polish chap I know to knock it up for me"

MORE JELLY?

THE DIRE state of the roads on the Isle of Wight has been the cause of much irritation to locals for decades (*Eyes passim*). So the prospect of an £800m private finance initiative (PFI) bonanza to upgrade them over 25 years appealed to the council's Tory leadership.

And it was quite a coup for the council to secure the services last November of Jay Jayasundara, a former civil servant whose CV includes being an adviser to the Treasury and Downing Street on PFI matters, as £130,000 project director.

Oddly, IoW's thrusting "communications" experts on secondment from Westminster council (*Eyes passim*) sat on news of the appointment for three months. It only became public in February, via a council staff newsletter. Surely this modesty about the council's star appointment has nothing to do with the fact that, after leaving Whitehall, "JJ" then worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers, who happen to be the advisers retained by the council to oversee the PFI project?

The same PricewaterhouseCoopers, by the way, whose director of corporate finance, Rod Cameron, told the *Observer* last month that in the current economic climate, obtaining funding for some PFI schemes was "like nailing jelly to a wall". Poop! Poop!

● **NOISY neighbours can celebrate turning up the volume in the London borough of Bexley. As part of a cost-cutting drive, the Tory council has decreed that its noise nuisance hotline will henceforth only operate during office hours – precisely when it is not needed. At other times – such as when the party next door is keeping you awake in the middle of the night – the sleepless and irate can call an answerphone and leave a message. The council will then send out a "complaint pack" with diary sheets – the start of a procedure which the council admits "may take several months" and can result in the offender's equipment being seized if a council officer "witnesses nuisance". As council officers will all be tucked up in bed at the relevant times, this seems unlikely to happen very often.**

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

HOW DID WE LISTEN TO A TRADITIONAL RADIO FOR ALL THOSE YEARS?
THE CLARITY OF THIS DIGITAL RADIO IS STARTLING... BUT FORGET CHORAL MUSIC, OPERA AND JAZZ...
IF YOU LISTEN CLOSELY ENOUGH YOU CAN ALMOST HEAR MELVYN BRAGG'S BRAIN WORKING
AURAL NIRVANA, JEZ, AURAL NIRVANA

WAYNE'S WORLD

IN PETERBOROUGH, the Tory council's unlikely "cabinet member for the environment" Wayne Fitzgerald – as *Eye* 1211 reported, he's a former DJ and pole dancing club owner who drives a gas-guzzling Beamer – has taken exception to voters who don't agree with him that spending £300,000 on a "water park" (paddling pool) in the city's Bretton Park would be a good idea.

Readers of the Peterborough *Telegraph* posted comments online suggesting that the scheme would be a waste of money and very likely become a target for vandals. Wayne was having none of this. "I suggest you go boil your head," he told one critic. "It may rinse out some of the bile you carry around in it." And to another he wrote: "If you cannot see how [it] will make Bretton a nicer place for kids then you are an idiot." Who said civilised political discourse was dead?

NOOKS and CORNERS

ONE of the down-sides to the recession and credit crunch is that charities are struggling and the money they need to maintain buildings is harder to find (though of course abolishing the counter-productive VAT levy on repairs, while alterations and new build remain exempt, would help).

It is particularly depressing that the National Trust for Scotland is in such financial trouble it is to shed a fifth of its 496 full-time staff and to close (temporarily?) and find alternative uses for some of its "loss-making" properties.

These include Haddo House by William Adam and 16th century Kellie Castle, later the home of Scotland's great Arts and Crafts architect, Sir Robert Lorimer. Another is Lorimer's Hill of Tarvit in Fife, which raises concerns about what will happen to the Sharp collection of furniture – the finest the trust has – if the house is let. Also under threat is the home of the tragic geologist Hugh Millar in Cromarty – poignant in this year of Charles Darwin worship.

Kate Mavor, the new chief executive of the National Trust for Scotland (only in the post for a matter of weeks), announced: "Like most organisations, the trust has been considerably affected by the recession and we accept we have to respond to the economic conditions by making these cost savings." But this is not the whole story, as the trust has been running on a deficit for a number of years – last year it was £1.7m. Two years ago, in a "reorganisation", redundancies were proposed and properties sold; while the trust has managed to get through three chief executives in as many years. All of which suggests the NTS is deeply troubled.

One problem seems to have been that the conservation charity has been contaminated by the prevailing business and managerial ethos, believing that the answer to its problems was to hire as chief executives dynamic people with business experience who understood nothing about the nature of the trust. Indeed, it embraced the new Scottish culture represented by the nation's favourite banker, Sir Fred Goodwin, when, last year the management team awarded themselves big pay rises (the then chief executive Mark Adderley, who lasted less than two years, saw his salary rise by some £40,000 to more than £170,000) while long-serving staff (average pay £23,000) were denied an inflation-level rise and the conservation budget was cut.

What's gone wrong in Scotland? England once looked north of the border for sanity and enlightenment in conservation matters. But now the semi-independent nation that gave so many great architects to the United Kingdom seems to be subsiding into populist neophiliac barbarism.

When, in 2007, Dumfries House and its magnificent collection of (Scottish) furniture was at risk, it was the Prince of Wales' Charities Foundation, together with the Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and other English-based institutions which came together to save it. Historic Scotland – a body almost as supine now as its Welsh counterpart CADW – did nothing, while the National Trust for Scotland had long before managed to foul up negotiations with the owner of the house, Lord Bute.

Founded in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is younger and much smaller (and poorer) than the National Trust, but has done great things. In recent years, however, it has lost its way and the latest desperate cost-cutting proposals are a gross insult not only to its loyal, expert staff and the many volunteers but also to all those in Scotland who care about conservation and support its work.

IN LIVERPOOL, meanwhile, where the £100m redevelopment of part of Hope Street by Maghull Developments has now been postponed, perhaps indefinitely, the recession has come too late.

Readers will recall* (Eye 1207) *how, after English Heritage declined to recommend it for listing, the façade of Josephine Butler House on the corner of Myrtle Street was hacked off by this spivvish firm in anticipation of receiving planning permission from Liverpool council, claiming that it was carrying out "specialist restoration work to the stone façade". Now Maghull has applied to make the cleared site of this once interesting building into a car park and has asked to expand this visual delight by another 14 parking spaces.

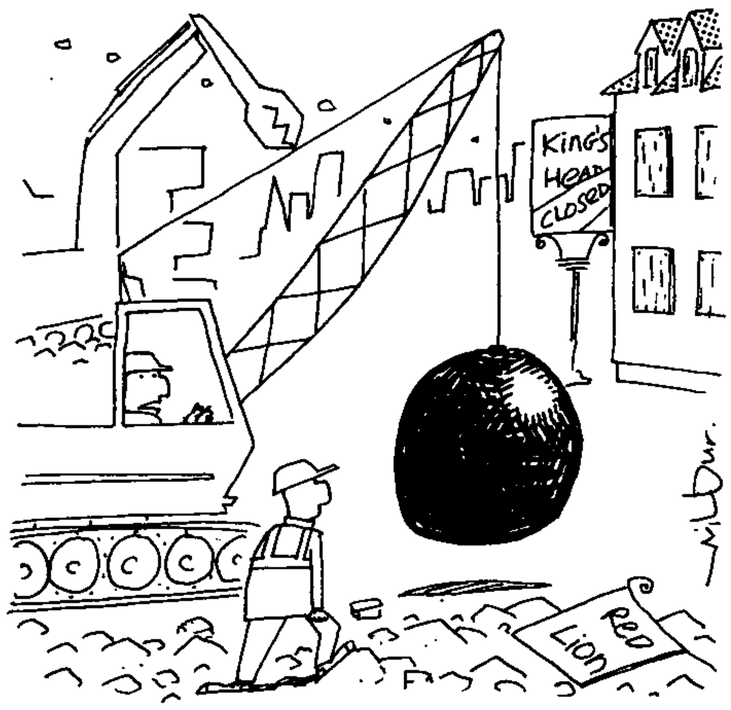
Another cleared site enhancing the former European Capital of Culture is that of the Beaufort Street Board School. This was one of the many sound and handsome Victorian school buildings that are still eminently suitable for their intended purpose or conversion, but are being recklessly squandered in favour of modish

Beaufort Street Board School after the fire

replacements built under the government's discredited private finance initiative.

A Gothic design by Charles R. Deacon dating from 1873-74, it was a listed building. When the school moved to a modern structure nearby, the Gothic building was abandoned to the elements and vandals. Eventually it was set on fire and left as a ruin, before being de-listed by English Heritage. A local resident had pleaded for this once-fine building to be secured against vandals, but in vain. A few months ago the ruin itself was cleared away – and now a strong security fence runs around the site. As the heroic Florence Gersten of the Save Our City Campaign says: "No doubt this completely empty space will be saved from vandalism!" Well done Liverpool.

'Piloti'



"Time for one more?"

OLD ENGLAND

LIQUIDATION TOTALE DERNIERS JOURS

Le Progrès (Lyons)

'I sang and did the vixen stuff'

She was the voice of the world's biggest family band. Now Andrea Corr is reinventing herself as a stage actress. She talks success, failure and fiddles with Sam Leith.

Grauniad website

"Sometimes I feel like everyone's trying to wind me up"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

IT'S nearly two years since the Festival Hall reopened after an eye-wateringly expensive renovation; and though it's had a few problems with the artistic direction of the tirelessly self-serving Jude Kelly, it's been working hard to convince the world that everything is under control.

Most recently it wrote to all the private donors who had agreed to carry on funding the renovation by direct debit, telling them their money wasn't needed any more as the project was complete and the debits would be cancelled. But it was sadly premature: the project's not complete at all. Most of the organ case is empty – an enormous, gaping hole – and from the South Bank's guarded silence on the subject, it will probably remain a gaping hole indefinitely.

Back in 2007, when the Festival Hall returned to business, it was with no more than a token array of organ pipes: just enough to pass muster for orchestral music that requires an organ somewhere in the background, but not for the big choral repertory that features the instrument, and still less for solo recitals. Most of the pipes were with Harrison & Harrison, the Durham-based organ-builders who were contracted to restore them. Except they'd downed tools because the money had run out.

Don't worry, said the South Bank board to organ-loving punters: everything's in hand and it will all be back in place by 2011 – which seemed a long way off, but then the world of organ restoration isn't fast-lane. Despite the wait, Harrisons still hasn't had any money, or indeed any instruction to carry on the work. So nothing has been done, and all those organ pipes have been gathering dust in a Durham warehouse – where they will remain for a long while because, even if Harrisons were given the go-ahead tomorrow, it's now almost certainly too late to think about completion by the promised date. Or anywhere near.

Given the iconic status of the Festival Hall organ – architecturally, musically, and as a piece of cultural history – the situation is scandalous. No admission had been forthcoming from the South Bank until a comment the other week from outgoing chief executive Michael Lynch, who was leaving his job anyway and so had nothing to lose.

Kelly, alas, is not on her way out (despite encouragement from many staff). And while she remains in office it might be a good idea if she wrenched her mind away from her competing interests as a stage director and gave some thought to restoring the national treasure entrusted to her.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Letters

Those cancelled subs in full...

...Your little article about Jade Goody on page 23 of issue 1230 was in extremely poor taste. It is a shame that a publication that – rightly – gets on its high-horse over a wide range of issues cannot resist the odd plunge into journalism's cesspool.

You can be twats at times...

CHRISTIAN HOLLYER.

...I do appreciate you have to fill up your pages somehow, but in these difficult times surely there's more than enough around that you might avoid resorting to a few laughs around the deaths of young children, and parents with same? And on the same page, even?

CALUM MACKAY.

...I was quite taken aback by the "6 year old boy dies" segment in this issue. What exactly was being satirised? I don't recall the coverage being too overwhelming, and part of the piece was sympathetic to Mrs Cameron anyway (as was an item on the first page of the issue), so why on earth print something in a manner that was guaranteed to upset? I think you got it wrong, and perhaps you should say the "s" word.

RICHARD CARROLL.

...Re: "Six Year Old Boy Dies". How did you come to the editorial decision that this was remotely appropriate? As a long-time subscriber I'm well used to (and enjoy) the Eye's near the knuckle satire, but you've really screwed up on this one. What the hell were you thinking of? Get your act together otherwise I'm done with you.

NICK JAMES.

...Re: The Queen Mum You'll Never See (Eye 1231). I do not think that this is funny. Please do not send me any more "Private Eyes".

C.A. STRAKER.

Crunching the numbers

Sir,

To put Sir Fred Goodwin's pension into perspective and illustrate how our society rewards its various citizens, how about this for a bit of number crunching?: £700,000 – one year of Sir Fred's pension. £525,000 – my entire salary throughout the 35 years I spent as a nurse in the National Health Service. 46 years – the length of time I will have to live and draw my NHS pension to get the equivalent of ONE year of Sir Fred's pension. 70 years – the length of time I would have to live drawing my State Old Age Pension if I was dependent on that alone in order to draw a similar amount.

My figures are adjusted for estimated future index-linking of my pensions, but not for any on Sir Fred's!

Yours sincerely,
EDDIE SYKES,

Long Marton, Cumbria.

Photo Opportunity

Sir,

Fred Goodwin's recent refusal to countenance a reduction in his pension has been given prominence in the news lately. I wonder do you have in your archives a photo of another public figure whose pursuit of a vested interest has led to extended public exposure?

DARREN HUNTER,

Via email.

Hip hip-hooray

Sir,

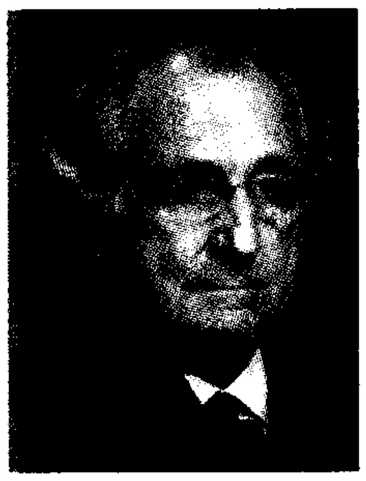
As a punter who had a hip replaced at the Shepton Mallet Treatment Centre, I voiced misgivings similar to MD's (Eyes 1229 & 1230) to my GP when he suggested I went there. While he broadly accepted my reservations, he said "Consider the practicalities: 1. You won't have to wait long. [I was operated on within eight weeks of talking to him.] 2. They're doing the same operations all the time, so they should know what they're about. 3. You won't get chucked off the operating table because there's been an RTA outside. 4. It's only a 30 bed unit and you're very unlikely to pick up MRSA there. 5. And yes, they do have cock-ups, but so do mainstream hospitals, too."

I went along quite cheerfully, received considerate, intelligent care from everyone with whom I came into contact, and recovered remarkably quickly from what was, as far as I know, a successful operation (November 2007).

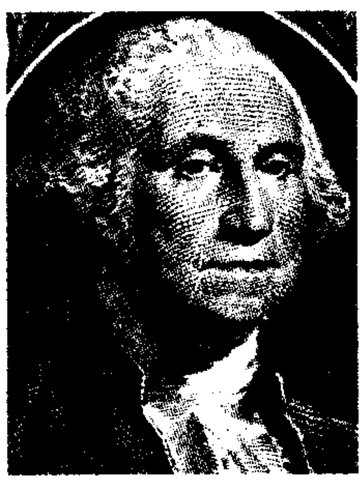
Yours truly,
D. MIKE ADKINS,

Sturminster Newton.

Lookalike



Washington



Madoff

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the resemblance between Bernard Madoff and the portrait of George Washington on the One Dollar bill? Could this be a subliminal reason why so many people trusted him with their money?

Yours,
OLIVER MAUDE-ROXBY,

London SW1.

Forest chumps

Sir,

Please allow me to correct some of the nonsense you have been spun concerning the Forest Stewardship Council, the global certification and labelling scheme that purports to reassure consumers that certain wood and paper products are from forests that are being exploited in a way that is "environmentally acceptable, socially beneficial and economically sustainable" ('Tree Stumped', Eye 1230).

The reality is that the FSC is issuing eco-certificates to forestry companies that are responsible for gross environmental abuses, destruction of rainforests, theft of land from indigenous people, and appalling labour conditions. Whilst the FSC's apologists no doubt find it convenient to dismiss such concerns as being merely a "personal vendetta" on my part (I actually helped set up the FSC in 1993, and feel some compunction to try and make it work the way it was intended), in fact they are being raised by leading NGOs, including local branches of Greenpeace, and dozens of other environmental and human rights organisations from Brazil to Finland, and Spain to Australia. Even some parts of the timber industry itself are now complaining that the FSC has allowed its certification assessors to get out of control and issue certificates of worthiness to destructive and in some cases illegal logging operations.

The FSC wood certification scheme might be the best of a bad bunch, but the point is that the public is being grossly deceived into believing that the thousands of FSC certified products found in almost all DIY sheds, furniture shops, and supermarkets in the UK, are genuinely ethically compliant, when at least some of them demonstrably are not.

Keep up the good work,
SIMON COUNSELL,

Executive Director, The Rainforest Foundation UK.

Sir,

We in Ireland were very surprised to see your blanket defence for the Forest Stewardship Council, and your condemnation of the decision by the Friends of the Earth UK to withdraw their support for the FSC.

Here in Ireland environmentalists have had to sit back in horror and watch the FSC certify Coillte, the Irish state forestry board, which manages 1 million acres of land, supposedly "on behalf of the Irish people".

Coillte's pesticide-laden monoculture plantations of Sitka Spruce (Christmas trees) have destroyed thousands of acres of some of Ireland's most wild and beautiful upland moors and bogs, polluted millions of gallons of pristine river and lake waters, in the process producing such fast-growing, low-grade timber that it has to be chipped and stuck back together with ferociously toxic glues to make mdf, ie a saleable product.

This environmental nightmare has been happily endorsed – for years – by FSC, the cherry on the toxic cake being the Soil Association's imprimatur of good and green forest management, by Coillte.

We applaud FoE's decision to withdraw from FSC's charade of good management, and wonder who are "the moderate campaign groups" who are opposed.

Is Private Eye no longer on the good guys side?

Regards,
BRENDAN KELLY

(Irish social and Environmental Stakeholders), Co Galway, Ireland.

Blood money

Sir,

Much as I congratulate your ongoing investigation into the treatment of the victims of contaminated imported blood (In the Back, Eye 1231), I feel an important point has been omitted. A quick scan of the numbers shows only a pitifully small percentage of the U.K population donate regularly. The point being that if more of us donated we would not need to import blood from the US. Finally, the fact that US citizens actually sell their blood is yet another example of the need to move on from a system based solely on money. We could just donate and help each other out. It doesn't hurt, you don't even miss it, and you get free tea and biscuits.

RIC CAMPBELL,

Perry, Cambs.

Scenes You Seldom See

"Now that our event is over, we should go round and take down all the posters"

Lookalike

"La Chata"

Winehouse

Sir,

The popular media would have us believe that Amy Winehouse is 25 years old. But on a recent trip to Barcelona, I visited the Picasso Museum and stumbled cross irrefutable evidence that she is, in fact, ***at least*** *110.*

Yours,
ROB BERNARD SMITH,
Birmingham.

Ratbiter diluted

Sir,

In response to 'Ratbiter's' piece ("Which Doctors?" Private Eye 1231), The Society of Homeopaths, which represents 60 percent of registered homeopaths in the UK, would like to correct some important inaccuracies.

Whilst it may be true that in the case of HIV/AIDS, some "homeopaths keep patients away from the treatment which helps sufferers – anti-retroviral drugs", it is worth noting that such behaviour would be in direct contravention of the Society's code of ethics & practice, sections 24, 32 and 75, which all registered members (RSHoms) have agreed to abide by.

A Society organised symposium on HIV/AIDS in September 2007 further reinforced this position, informing delegates that: "This Society symposium is not offering a cure for this disease nor is it endorsing in any way any of the methods used by the speakers... In its patient-centred approach, the Society does not endorse the stopping of existing treatment programmes eg anti-retroviral drugs. What it is exploring is a homeopathic and integrated approach that can help deal with some of the symptoms of this disease."

It is inaccurate to describe Jeremy Sherr as a fellow of the Society of Homeopaths. While he was given that title in 1991 in recognition of his contribution to homeopathy, he resigned his membership in 2005, and as such is no longer entitled to use the designation "FSHom".

Lastly, the Society would like to make it clear that far from being "snake oil", there is in fact plenty of evidence to show that homeopathy works over and above the effect of placebo. By the end of 2007, 134 randomised controlled trials of homeopathy had been published in peer-reviewed journals. Of these trials, 59 were positive i.e. demonstrating that homeopathy has an effect beyond placebo; eight were negative and the remaining 67 were inconclusive.

Yours sincerely,
PAULA ROSS,
Chief Executive, Society of Homeopaths.

Sir,

Ratbiter's slating of Kevin Morris, a contributor to your letters page, in his last column (Eye 1231) was completely inappropriate.

Ratbiter has a fortnightly column in which to vent his spleen, while the hapless Mr Morris, who merely stuck up for homeopathic medicine against the Eye's knee-jerk prejudices, will have little opportunity to respond publicly to the two mentions he gets.

I don't remember Mr Morris promoting the work of Jeremy Sherr and his dubious-looking activities in Tanzania in his letter, so why is Ratbiter linking the two issues? That's like binning the whole of western medicine due to the abuses of one or two British Medical Association members.

Morris's original letter picks holes in the reliability of double-blind trials of pharmaceuticals. What he does not point out is that double-blind trials are unlikely ever to prove that helpful in assessing the efficacy of alternative medicine anyway, because most holistic treatments are aimed at prevention rather than the treatment of acute problems. If I had a tumour I would go straight to my GP. If I were feeling weak, achey and run down I would go to an alternative practitioner. If I went to a GP with this kind of general malaise, he would tell me to come back when it had developed into something he could see, like a tumour.

CATHY COOPER,
Via email.

Sir,

Re: Ratbiter's article on Jeremy Sherr. I was disappointed to find that the magazine I have loved – nay, bought! – since 1974 is finally riding with the big battalions of conventional medicine. If one were to judge by the assured display of unquestioning contempt for homoeopathy, then Ratbiter's piece could easily have been lifted straight out of the Guardian or Observer. (Ouch!!)

Yours,
NICK HEWES,
Via email.

"The usual hysteria – are we living in a surveillance society?"

Fanny ha ha

Sir,

Your Ad Nauseam column (Eye 1231) questions the intent behind the labelling of "4King cupcakes". This is from a company whose factory by the A40 in Witney used to sport a hoarding depicting TV Chef Craddock removing a tray of cakes from the oven under the caption "Our muffins are moist and sticky, just like Fanny's." I think they know a double entendre when they're thrusting it in our faces.

Sincerely,
RICHARD BALDRY,
Via email.

From the horse's mouth

Sir,

'Remote Controller', in his/her review of Margaret (Eye 1231), doubts the authenticity of Mrs Thatcher proposing to carry on as Prime Minister even if dethroned as Tory leader and asks: "Did she actually say it?" Well, yes she did, according to Woodrow Wyatt's diary. (See my book, Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady, p.733). Remote Controller's expectations were misled by the earlier film, The Long Walk to Finchley, which was a tongue-in-cheek satirical fantasy; almost everything in Margaret, by contrast, was scrupulously sourced.

JOHN CAMPBELL,
London.

Pedantry corner

...As daft as the answer given by the contestant regarding the 13th state to enter the union and named after a British king might be (Texas), it's probably no dafter than the answer I assume Anne Robinson had on her screen. Georgia was the fourth state to cut ties with Britain and, unless I've misread my history books, there was no King Rhode-Island.

DAN STOCKLEY (King Pedant IV).

...Sadly the explanation of the use of "Crabs" and "Crab Fat" for members of the RAF is a little recent. The one that preceeds it told to me by my father, a rating in the aicraft carrier HMS Argus on her first commission only a couple of years after the founding of the RAF, was:

Initially, RAF members were dressed in Army uniform but the colour was grey – that used in the paint for naval vessels at that time, called by the RN "Crab Fat Grey", as it was similar to the colour of crabs and lobsters before cooking. So RAF personnel were initially given the name "Crab Fat Soldiers" which became "Crab Fat" and then "Crabs".

HENRY CHANDLER.

...Will Adam could well be right (Pedantry Corner Eye 1229) in referring to me as sad but not I can assure him misinformed. Whereas the full name of the Order of the British Empire does include the words "Most Excellent" (Letters Patent June 4 1917) nevertheless it is correct to state that the abbreviation CBE stands for Commander of the Order of the British Empire and my authority is Burke's Handbook to the Order of the British Empire 1921.

GRAHAM R. RITCHIE.

...The people at Setanta Sports may be useless satellite broadcasters, but at least they understand the procedures of Association Football, unlike your contributor to Colemanballs (Eye 1231). The game has three possible outcomes, and therefore to ask: "So Harry – is this a game Tottenham must win or is it a game you can't afford to lose?" is perfectly fair, if rather banal. Not losing could mean drawing, thereby gaining one point, and even Harry would have been able to understand the implications of that question.

MIKE PAINTER.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

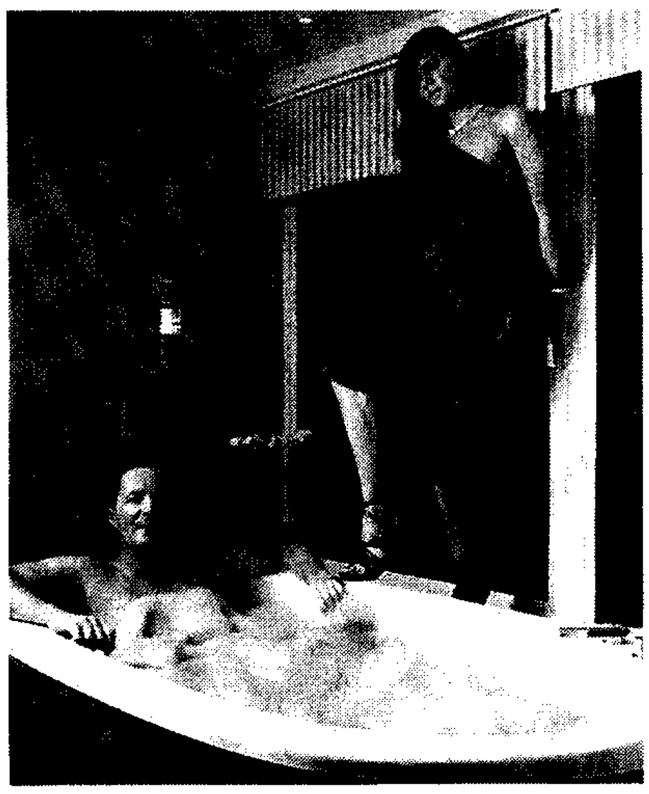
"Aliadiere, the Frenchman with the never-ending name"
Commentator, ITV
(Paul Howard)

"Knives do more harm than good"
GORDON BROWN, Talksport
(Gary Waterman)

"Possession [of the ball] is now nine-tenths of the law"
DAVID PLEAT, ITV
(Paul Wood)

"...and Stewie Downing will look at this with his left foot"
GARY GILL, Radio Tees
(H.C. Raistrick)

"There are a lot of tired legs in those white shirts."
ANDY GRAY, Sky Sports
(Rob Merkin)



GRAND EASTER CAPTION COMPETITION

Readers are invited to submit captions to accompany this charming photograph of TV's Piers Morgan and his girlfriend, Celia Walden, which appeared recently in some of the popular papers.

First prize: a copy of Piers' new book

Second prize: two copies of Piers' new book

Pseudo Names

...I predict that your Pseudo Names section will, for many years to come, be a great burden for you to shoulder.

ALBERT ROSS.

...Try as I might, I am unable to think up a funny name with which to sign off this letter. However, I will not give up easily.

PERCY VEER.

...Due to the cleverness of your readers and the near infinite array of possibilities available in the English language, I'm afraid I see no end in sight to this nonsense.

CLARE VOYANT.

...These pseudo-pseudonyms will have to end sometime. I only hope we're all here when they do.

PETER ROUT.

...Your "pseudo names' section is just a pointless collection of nonsense words. It is quite atrocious.

SUE PERCALLI
FRA GELSTIC
X.P.
ALI DOCIOUS.

...All these Pseudo Names" are fast becoming a load of puffed up hot air, with just the odd bit of substance. Can I demand an end to it before, once again, I open my latest edition of Private Eye and feel instantly deflated and let down?

SUE FLEY.

....I think that you keep saying that you are going to stop the Pseudo Names column just to get more letters.

CYN NICK.

...The suggestion by Cindy-Kate Rightaway (Eye 1231) that you copyright your content such as the amusing pseudonyms section is wise advice. The media are a bunch of pirates.

R. JIMLAD
P. SISSOVATE
SHIVA MITIMBARS.

...Here in the East End, we think it's time to stop.

LEE VITT
ART WILLYER.

...Would your Letters editor please stop prevaricating about bringing the Pseudo Names correspondence to a close? The suspense is killing me!

WILLIE WOANTIE.

...We the undersigned share more than a name: we are each finding the idiocy in the letters pages more and more infuriating.

ANNE GRIER & ANNE GRIER.

...It has been most amusing reading the Pseudo Names correspondence, but care should be taken to edit out some of the ruder names.

MARTHA FARQHUAR.

...I reckon your Pseudo Names section is brilliant... In fact, I love it – an' I love you, too... You're my bes' mate, you are.

ASA NEWT.

...These people clamouring for a bit of attention by getting their letters in Pseudo Names – it's all a bit childish, isn't it?

L. O'MUM.

...As founder members of the Scandinavian Bartenders Association we cannot let the claim of CARL INGBLACK-LABLE to hold the title of probably the best pseudo name in the world to go unchallenged. As any fule kno, our friend CARL S. BERG has held that distinction for many years and, in all likelihood, will do so for many years to come.

LARS TORDERS
JORGE LASSES-PLIS.

...Here in Ireland we bid a sad farewell to Pseudo Names. It cast a ray of sunshine through the gloom of post-Celtic Tiger Hibernia, and no doubt brought similar pleasure to your sub-editors each fortnight.

COLM INCHES
(Dunfyllin)

...I think I know why you are allowing your Pseudo Names column to run and run.

LESTER WRIGHT.

...I for one welcome the influx of silly names onto your letters page, as we here in Norway have little to do during the dark, snow-bound winter months and I could quite happily read this section of your esteemed magazine for as long as it takes.

TILDA KÅUSKUMHØLM
(Kristiansand, Norway),

...I assume after its popular run we will soon be saying farewell to Pseudo Names.

HARRY VA DERCI.

...We believe that this column has gone as far as it can.

ANNE DANNOW
D.N. DISNERE
ANNE-ZOE IPHASE
DEE FEIN-AL-KHURTAN.

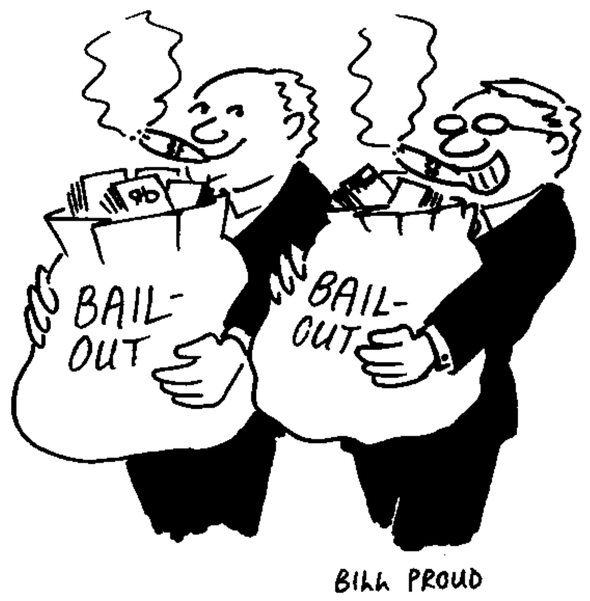
...Ca suffit.

SUE DE NIMES.

■ The Editor would like to thank readers for the hundreds and hundreds of similar letters on this vital topic that have arrived in the office this week. This correspondence is now closed. Probably. Ed.

● *Pseudo Names Special www.private-eye.co.uk*

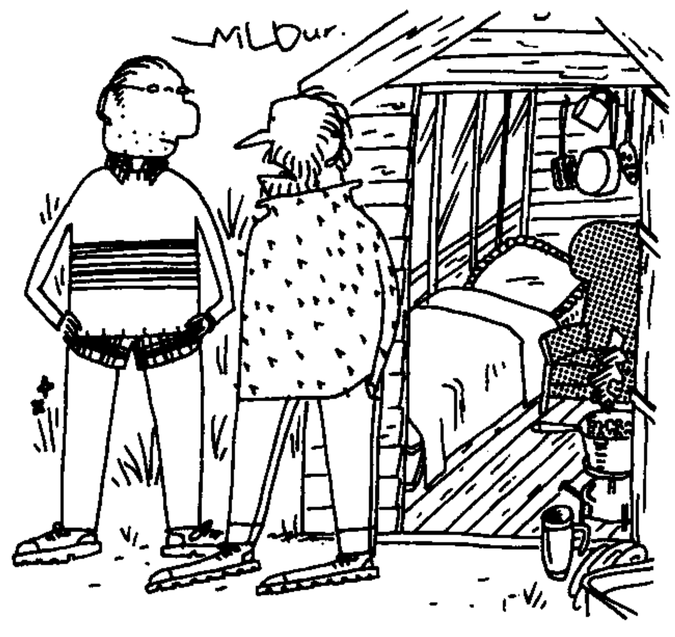
Cartoon Crunch



"It's a good thing some people still pay tax"

"Daddy is a big noise in the City"

"What did you have to buy a structured investment vehicle for?"



"My allotment has been a godsend since the downturn"

Letter from **Damascus**

from Our Own Correspondent

"I BELIEVE in Syria." President Bashar al-Assad's slogan might not be as memorable as "Yes, we can", but staying vague can be useful in politics, and that's what the US and Syrian presidents are both doing as Obama seeks some Middle East policies.

These days it's hard to swing one's prayer beads in Damascus without hitting a visiting US politician. Among them have been Jeffrey Feltman, state department number two, and John Kerry, 2004 Democratic presidential candidate. He advises Obama and announced "an important moment of change", delighting our rulers.

But diplomacy's a curious business. After all, we are run by a wing of the same Baath party that ruled Iraq under Saddam Hussein; and our president is an Arab nationalist committed to confronting American imperialism and its proxy, Israel. But reality is more cynical. Our rulers, including the Assad family, hail from the minority Alawi sect and think better relations with the US can help them out locally. Having the Alawis in charge and enriching themselves annoys most Syrians, who are God-fearing Sunni Muslims. Many would like an Islamic government to clamp down on the nightclubs, boutiques and Lebanese banks loved by our Alawi masters.

Thus Assad hopes to convince Obama they share an enemy in al-Qaeda and other Sunni extremists. After 9/11, indeed, there was even US-Syrian "intelligence co-operation" against the bearded ones. Kerry and Feltman have signalled that Obama wants to go further, with a new US ambassador in two months and the new secretary of state Hillary Clinton visiting within six. The ambassador was withdrawn in 2005 after Rafik Hariri, the ex-Lebanese prime minister, was killed by a bomb many thought was primed in Syria. Sending an ambassador would signal US soft-pedalling over our misdeeds in Lebanon and human rights abuses here. (Indeed Kerry alarmed rights campaigners by not raising their plight.)

So why is this happening? The prize for Obama, who craves an early foreign policy success, is direct Syria-Israel peace talks. For our rulers, talks under US sponsorship would show their own international importance and raise hopes of recovering the Golan Heights, a wine-growing region of Syria under Israeli occupation since 1967. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's new leader, wants a peace process with Syria to distract attention from the Palestinians. Even if talking to Syria leads nowhere, it deflects headlines away from new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Israel's strengthening military grip on Gaza.

As usual, the Palestinians complicate things for our rulers. Not only are they ungrateful for Assad's steadfast moral support against Israel, but they have attracted the sympathy of most Syrians by being bombed so badly in Gaza! Damascus is plastered with posters extolling the Gazans and their leaders, who unfortunately hail from the militant Sunni Muslim group, Hamas. While the group's leader, Khaled Meshaal, lives in Damascus, it's been made clear he is not to dabble in local politics – after all, Hamas was once part of the Muslim Brothers, the international body of bearded men banned and underground here.

And here's a problem that needs fudging before the Syrian-US love-in gets serious. While US and Syrian officials agree the Palestinians need a new government involving both Hamas and its secular rival Fatah, the US wants one of "technocrats" but we want one of "national unity". The wording matters. Obama wants to say Hamas is out (even if some "technocrats" are members) because Washington sees Hamas as "terrorists". But Assad wants to say Hamas is in so he gets credit for helping Hamas into a Palestinian government, so making it harder for the bearded ones to criticise him for talking to Israel.

If it works, everyone will be happy – apart from us Syrians who will still live under one of the region's most unpleasant dictatorships.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "As part of the government's agreement with the International Monetary Fund, police personnel and equipment will now be available for private rental," a spokesman for the Serbian Interior Ministry told a press conference in Belgrade. "Should you wish to rent a police uniform, the cost will be 1,440 dinars per day. A police horse can be hired for 2,880 dinars per day, while the company of a police dog costs 2,160 dinars per day. Police helicopters and aeroplanes can also be hired, but be prepared to set aside between 54,000 and 168,000 dinars per hour, depending on the type of aircraft you require. Individual police officers can be hired for 360 dinars per hour. Official police escorts for the transport of weapons or hazardous materials are negotiable."

Dragan Todorovic of the Serbian Radical Party denounced the half-a-billion-euro emergency deal with the IMF, complaining that Serbia has become "an unbridled consumer state with too many ministries. Everything is up for sale or rental. Citizens are already burdened with debts which have grown to unimaginable heights. We are walking the path of economic slavery, and will in short time be overwhelmed by the big tide of the world economic crisis." *(The Serbia Observer, 19/1/09. Spotter: Mark Baillie)*

– ● –

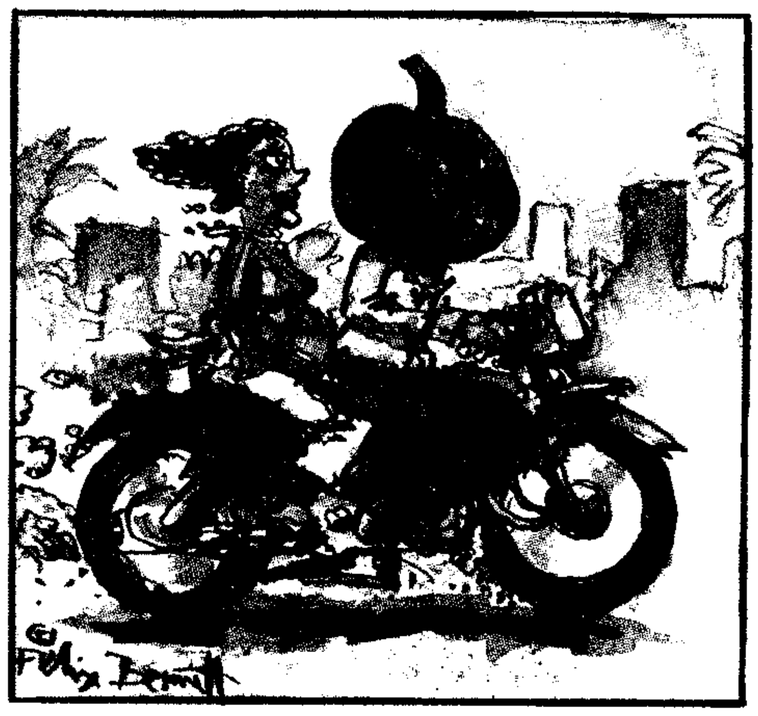
● *"Sir, News about dog attacks seems to be an almost daily occurrence. However, I have not seen any advice forthcoming on how to deal with a dog attack. The breeds usually concerned have incredibly powerful jaws which they clamp onto their target, and have huge core strength, as indicated by their muscular build.*

"I recall reading that the only way to break this 'clamp' is to insert your fingers up the dog's rectum, thereby breaking the core muscle spasm. Remember this nugget of information, it could save a life. I know, because last year I witnessed a dog attack in Dedworth. The attacking dog was a bull terrier type, and had clamped onto its target, a collie dog. The screams from the victim were awful. A crowd of people, including a large man, were trying to separate the dogs, and failing. I had no option but to use my recalled method and, as a small middle-aged woman, inserted my fingers into the bull terrier's rectum. The dog immediately released its grip, and the other dog was removed and saved.

"My method may be unpleasant (get some gloves!), and may not always work, but it's better than knowing nothing! Keep it in your memory bank – you never know when you might need it. Jill Davison, Greenfell Place, Maidenhead." (Slough Express, 16/1/09. Spotter: J Dover)

– ● –

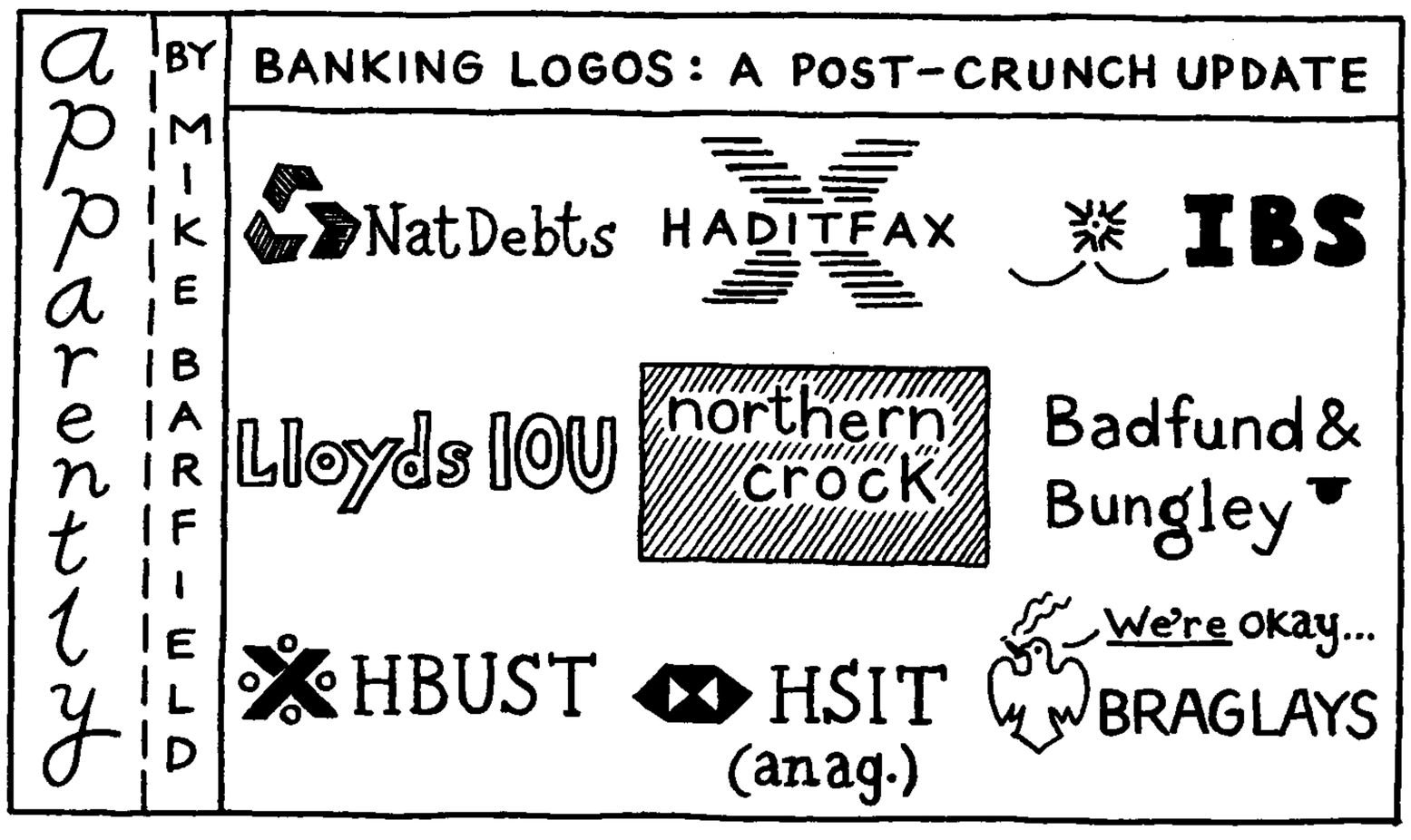
● "We are taking a hard line with motorcycle-taxi drivers who do not wear crash helmets," Yusuf Garba of the Federal Road Safety Commission told reporters in Kano, Nigeria. "We are impounding their bikes and taking them to court, so they can explain why they think wearing a dried pumpkin shell or a plate or a rubber tyre tied onto their head with string



is good enough. We told them six months ago that this law was coming into force, so they have had ample time to purchase proper helmets. We simply will not tolerate this disobedience."

However, many drivers of Nigeria's thousands of okadas (motorcycle-taxis) are refusing to abide by the new law regarding crash helmets. "The helmets are too expensive," complained Kolawole Aremu. "They cost almost $30 each, and passengers often steal them from us when they reach their destination. And some people cast spells on the helmets before they sell them, so the driver falls unconscious, and they can rob him. Also, I am worried about picking up an infection from the helmets, so I prefer to wear a calabash (dried pumpkin shell) on my head, or even a bucket with holes in for the eyes."

Fifty okadas and their drivers have so far been seized in Kano alone, and hundreds more across Nigeria. *(Cape Times, 8/1/09. Spotter: Mal Function)*



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 40

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

It is with great pride that I can report that my historic address to the People's Congress of the American Republic in Washington was a huge triumph, witnessed by the 19 standing ovations I received, a higher figure than that achieved by any previous Supreme Leader – least of all the toadying former Comrade Blair who could register no more than a pathetic 18 as he pledged support for the American President. No Comrades, my speech pledging undying support for the American President marked a new beginning in the special relationship between our two nations.

There was further proof of this growing bond between myself and Comrade President Obama when he granted me an unprecedented six minutes one-to-one meeting in the corridor outside the Oval office.

We had a wide-ranging discussion covering all the important issues confronting the world today, including global warming, the international financial crisis, the problems in the Middle East, aid to Africa, the challenge from China and Russia, the nuclear threat from Iran, the War against Terror, and whether I was going to have a nice day.

As befits a world statesman of supreme importance I was honoured to receive a magnificent gift from the President consisting of a cardboard box containing the following DVD's:

- Columbo – complete series 4
- Sex and the City – series 6 and 7
- Spiderman III
- The Best of Letterman

Comrades, these influential cultural artefacts – although their format makes them unplayable on our English DVD equipment – will be cherished by myself and my family for years to come.

So I have returned home in triumph, invigorated and ready to begin preparations for the historic G20 (Gordon Twenty!) Conference of World Leaders to be held here in London under ***my*** personal aegis and at ***my*** instigation. I have already prepared the agenda which I have emailed to all Comrade Attendees throughout the globe outlining what we will achieve.

1. A new global system to ensure economic stability.
2. New global regulations to ensure the implementation of (1).
3. New global growth to result from (1) and (2).
4. The restoration of confidence in the abilities of governments to achieve points (1), (2) and (3).
5. Continued vigilance to prevent backsliding protectionist deviationism from any of the above.

Comrades, I solemnly pledge that all of this ***will*** be agreed.

As a result, it would perhaps be an exaggeration for me to claim exclusive credit for saving the planet but there is no way I can prevent Comrades from coming to this conclusion themselves on the grounds that it is true.

Yours,

Gordon Brown

Supreme Leader

Enemy of the People

Comrade Sir Victor Blank

The disgraced capitalist whose ill-conceived scheme for merging Lloyds Bank and HBOS has ended, as I predicted, in disaster. Typically this self-promoting dilettante has failed to confess his errors and instead has sought to blame the Supreme Leader for proposing such an obviously ludicrous idea.

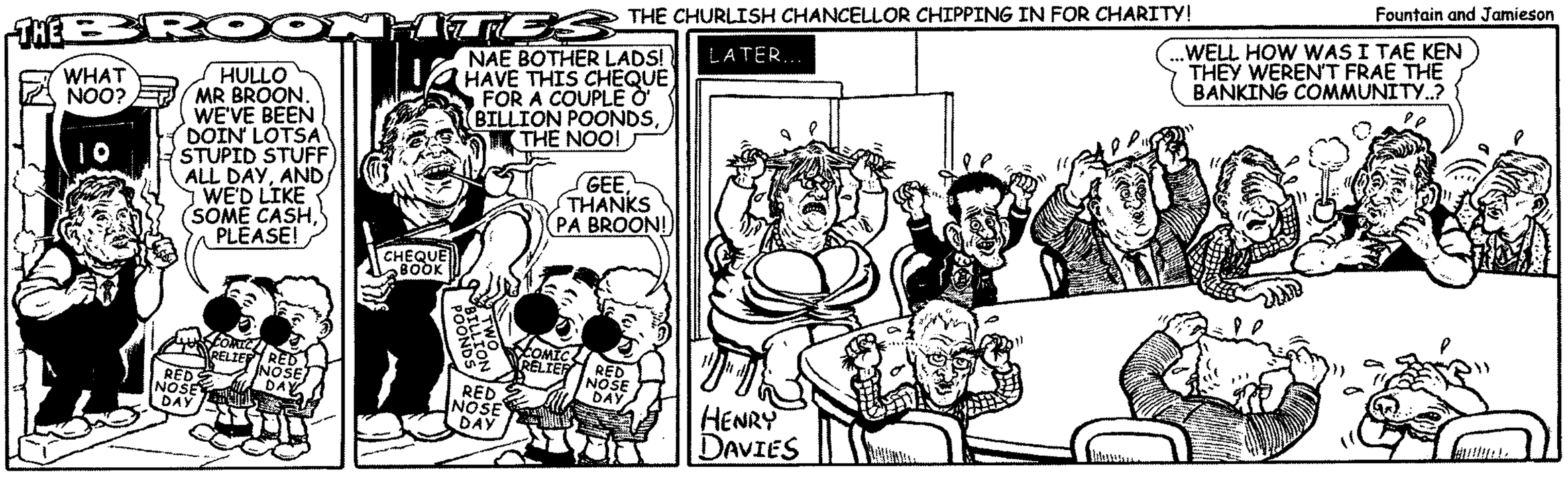
Comrade Sir Victor is well aware that throughout the entire five minutes of the negotiating process in the People's Balti Exchange Curry House, I urged him to think again and warned him of the perils that lay ahead were he to embark on such a foolhardy course of action.

Comrade Sir Victor's honour, the Order Of The Third Way (1st class), was of course conferred on him by the discredited former leader Comrade Blair as part of his persistent grovelling sycophancy to the running dogs of international mercantile fraudulism i.e. banking. G.B.

"Sorry is the hardest word to say, especially when you have not done anything wrong"

Let me commend this saying to Comrade Darling, who *has* done something wrong by saying that we have made mistakes in our handling of the economy. This is a mistake. And Comrade Darling should apologise to me at once. G.B.

THE BROONITES — THE CHURLISH CHANCELLOR CHIPPING IN FOR CHARITY! — Fountain and Jamieson


WHAT NOO?
HULLO MR BROON. WE'VE BEEN DOIN' LOTSA STUPID STUFF ALL DAY, AND WE'D LIKE SOME CASH, PLEASE!
COMIC RELIEF
RED NOSE DAY
RED NOSE DAY
NAE BOTHER LADS! HAVE THIS CHEQUE FOR A COUPLE O' BILLION POONDS, THE NOO!
CHEQUE BOOK
GEE, THANKS PA BROON!
TWO BILLION POONDS
COMIC RELIEF
RED NOSE DAY
RED NOSE DAY
LATER...
...WELL HOW WAS I TAE KEN THEY WEREN'T FRAE THE BANKING COMMUNITY..?
HENRY DAVIES

G20 – BROWN PROMISES NEW STABLE DOOR

by Our Economics Staff in Horse-sham, West Sussex

THE Prime Minister last night pledged that at the forthcoming International Summit in London all the world leaders would sign up to his plan to mend the stable door.

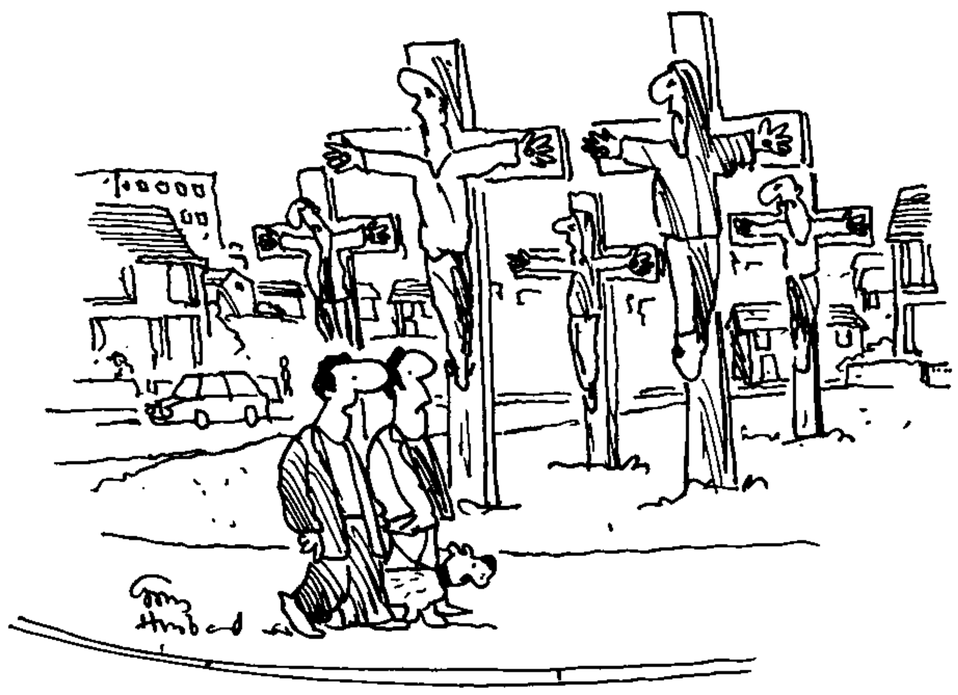
Said the Prime Minister, "We cannot ignore the fact that the horse may have already done a certain amount of bolting, but future generations will not forgive us if we do not institute the necessary measures to instigate a new door security regime process.

"Plans are already advanced," he said, "to install a new-look door with all the latest safeguards to prevent it ever opening again.

Gee-Gee 20

"State-of-the-art hinges are to be put in place with an international fail-safe locking mechanism, which all the countries in the world have already agreed to."

However, when asked if he had any idea where the horse was or how they could get it back into the stable, Mr Brown was unavailable for comment.



"There were unruly youths all over the estate. The police were never around, so we decided to act ourselves"

THOSE NORTH KOREAN PIZZAS IN FULL

pizzerias of Pyongyang

Tomato, Mozzarella and Sausage Dog

Tomato, Mozzarella and Hot Dog

Tomato, Mozzarella and Running Dog

Tomato, Mozzarella and Lap Dog

Anything you can't eat, take away in a doggy bag!!

Advertisement

New from Gnome

New Formula VAZoline!

The wonder lubricant that oils the wheels of justice!

Are you having problems in the courts? Finding the judge a bit sticky? Simply apply new improved Vazoline! And Hey Presto! Everything's smooth again!

WARNING ! *Vazoline is a greasy, oily, jelly-like product which must be handled with care. Wash hands after use or you might find yourself implicated in a major scandal.*

VAZoline! – *A Hinduja Product*

A Taxi Driver writes

EVERY week a well-known Cabbie tackles an issue of topical importance. This week **Mickey Snotter** (crime no. 747348BZ) .

You see about the Black Cab rapist, lady? Shocking innit really? Giving us cabbies a bad name? We're all tarred with the same brush now aren't we? All it takes is one rotten apple – no, I reckon they should string 'im up! It's the only language people like him understand!

By the way Miss, you'll never guess, but I just won the lottery – a million pounds! And it just so happens I've got a bottle of champagne here in the glove compartment. Lovely bubbly! Why don't we have a glass together?

NEXT WEEK: Mickey Snotter on the shocking failures of the Metropolitan Police to catch him over the last twenty years.

THE BIBLICAL TIMES

CLIMATE CHANGE 'ALARMIST' ATTACKED

by Our Ecological Staff **Ferdinand Mount Ararat**

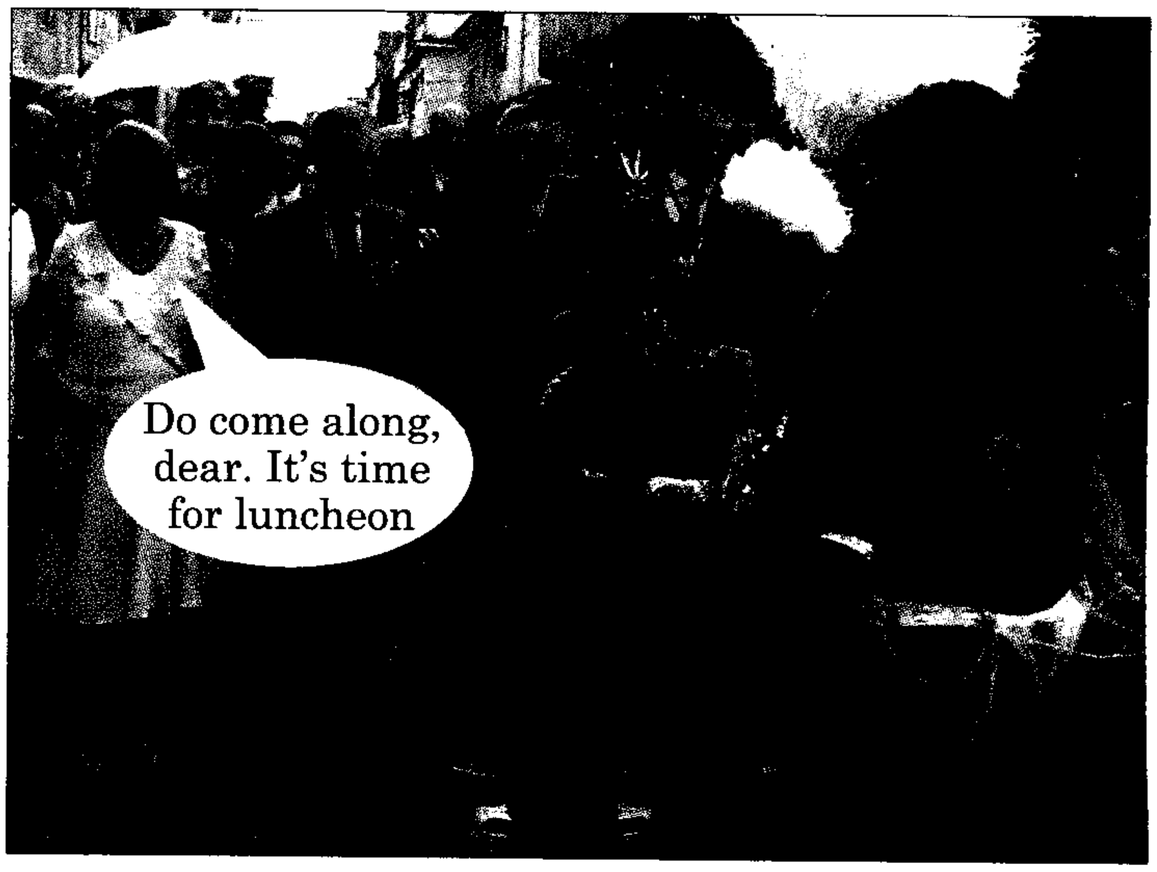
CLAIMS by leading environmentalist, Noah, that sea levels were going to rise dangerously and that an unprecedented increase in rainfall would create a flood that would engulf the entire world, were dismissed yesterday as "alarmist nonsense".

Noah's Barking

At a conference of leading flood deniers in the Holy Land, one speaker, Professor Rainstorm, claimed, "It is not uncommon at this time of year to see 96 inches of rain fall in an hour or to see certain animal species going two-by-two aboard arks and glug... glug... glug...

ON OTHER PAGES

● Your Rains Tonight



Evening Pravda

Russian leader visits top London newspaper

Seen above: Russian statesman, Democrat and thinker (Alexander Lebedev) with someone called Gorbachev and Pravda editor Gorbie Greg

The England Rugby Team
An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression in recent weeks that we considered the England Rugby Team to be in some way inadequate as representatives of their country in the sport of Rugby Union.

Headlines such as "Wheels Fall Off Sweet Chariot!", "Try Harder You Useless Scumbags" and "Why don't You Ruck Off You Loser Tosspots" may have left readers with the impression that we entertained a low opinion of the gentlemen in question.

We now realise, following the recent victory over France that there was not a "jot or scintilla" of truth whatsoever in the above. On the contrary we would wish to put on record that this particular England Squad are possibly the finest group of outstanding sportsmen who have ever represented their country in the noble game of Rugby Football.

As today's papers put it under the appropriate headline, "'Johnson's Boys Eat Frog's Legs For Breakfast' – All hail to our conquering heroes. This is undoubtedly the greatest victory over the French since Agincourt".

On Other Pages *The England Cricket Team: What A Load Of Tossers. p94*

STARING INTO THE ABYSS

by Our Northern Ireland Staff **Continuity O'Coughlin**

IT IS twelve years since the Good Friday Agreement and in all that time we never thought we would have to read this sort of piece again.

But now the clock has turned back and the dark days have returned. Once again, readers are being assaulted by what they are calling "The Terrible Piece Process".

Once again, they have to read the awful words "Antrim", "Craigavon", "Northern" and "Ireland" in long pieces analysing the security situation.

Columnists who we never thought we would see again are back on the front pages shooting their mouths off and firing their copy (surely "filing", Ed) as though the Good Friday Agreement had never existed.

Shocking headlines like "Not Again!", "Bastards", "Staring into the Abyss" and "Jade's Final Hours" (surely some mistake? Ed) are uniting the country in a desire not to read the newspapers ever again.

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

0900 hrs Officers despatched to Ratner's Quality Jewellery Emporium in Costcutter Road to prevent major robbery by suspicious afro-caribbean suspect, observed looking in the window whilst armed with a dangerous crutch due to a fractured metatarsal.

Officers duly apprehended Neasden FC's Nigeria-born striker Moses Onanugu, 25. The suspect was handcuffed and found to be in possession of large sums of money (£20) which it transpired was his weekly salary from Neasden FC, with which he had intended to purchase a new watchstrap for his father in Lagos.

Onanugu was charged with Aggravated Window Shopping and Inciting Racial Hatred amongst police officers.

1200 hrs All officers to attend "Welcome Home Our Heroes March" by men of the North Circular Rifles returning from Basra.

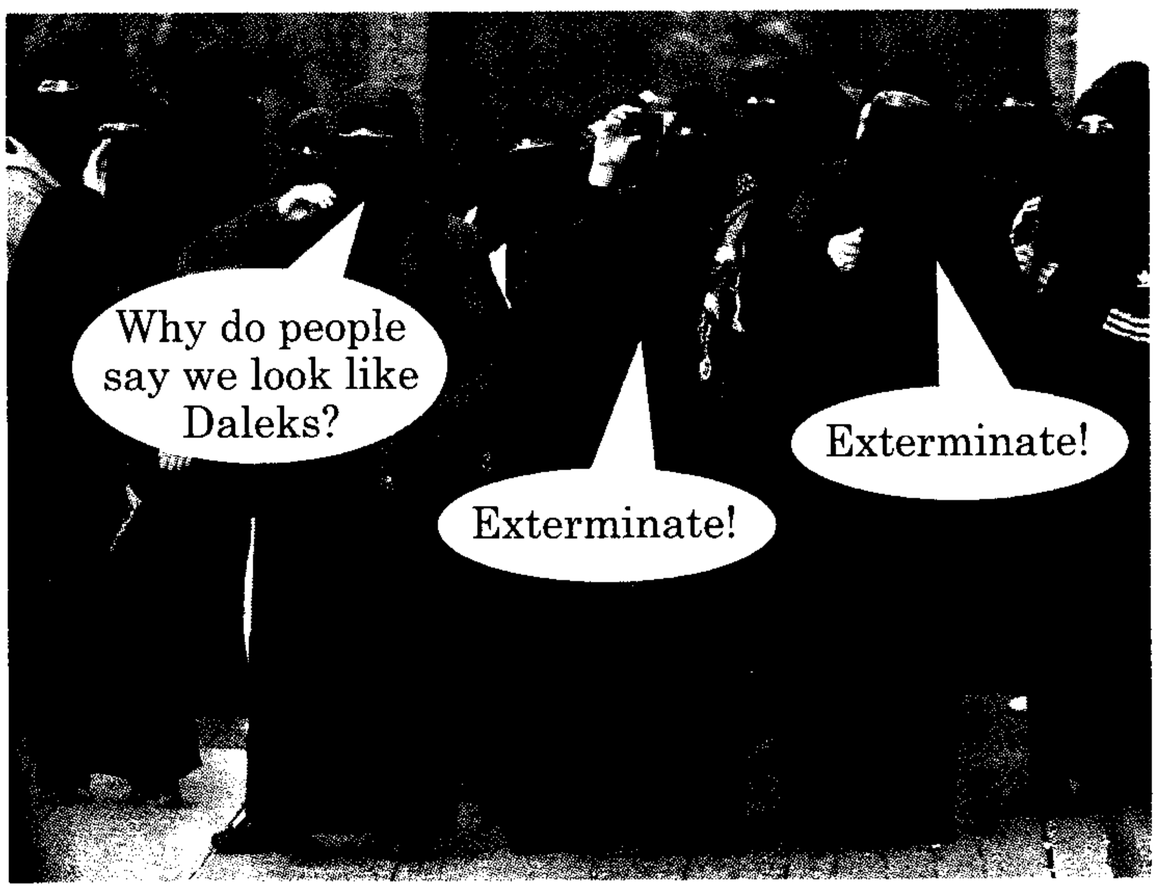
1207 hrs All officers redeployed to provide protection for anti-March demonstrators from the Neasden branch of the Al Quaeda Support Association, leader Abu bin Asda, bearing placards, eg "Death to the Basra Murderers", "Slaughter the British Rapists" and "End Free Speech Now".

Following exchanges of abuse between demonstrators and bystanders, two of the troublemakers (ie the bystanders) were immediately taken into custody under the Prevention of Religious Hatred Act 2009.

1600 hrs The demonstrators finally dispersed under police escort to the North London Synagogue in order to commit acts of graffiti, arson, etc.

1800 hrs Officers commended for their heroic conduct during the march and plans made for a "Salute Our Brave Boys In Blue" Police victory parade from the tube station to the Star of Luton Curry House in Pricerite Road.

PROTEST LATEST



Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *Born To Be Queen, Heir Of Sorrows* and *You're Never Too Old.*

THE STORY SO FAR: Prince Charles is feeling low after the excitement of his 60th birthday has worn off. Now read on...

IT REALLY is appalling..." Charles flung down his freshly-ironed copy of the Daily Mail, upsetting his row " of six boiled eggs and buttered soldiers made from stoneground wholewheat locally sourced bread.

Camilla raised an eyebrow as she scanned the *Racing Post*'s list of runners in the Queen Mother's Statue Cup at Cheltenham. "What's appalling this time?" she asked, lighting a Trident Full Strength untipped.

"Listen to this," Charles spluttered. "Some professor chap has had the flaming bloody cheek to say that my Duchy Detox Elixir, made from handpicked nettles and fresh celery is, and I quote, 'Of no use whatsoever and could even be dangerous'."

Camilla blew out an exquisitely formed smoke ring which hovered above Charles' boiled eggs like an unearthly halo.

"Calm down, Chazza," she soothed. "Your face has gone the colour of the raspberry jam."

Charles harrumphed furiously. "I mean, one does one's best, you know, to help people who are poisoning themselves with these toxin thingies. You take that fat girl in the village who works in the shop where you get your cigarettes, I mean, she must be terribly unhealthy. Someone's got to help her and a good dose of nettles and celery could wash away all those chips and crisps and chocolate pie thingies."

"Really, Chazza," Camilla countered. "It's only a gimmick with your Duchy brand. Duchy this, Duchy that... they've even got it in Waitrose now."

Charles banged his egg spoon down furiously. "*No*. No. It actually works. And since we're being frank, old girl, it wouldn't do you any harm to have a detox either."

Camilla groaned. She knew all too well what was coming.

"In fact, I'm going to ring up Barkworth from the Duchy now to get him to send a bottle round and you're going to take some. And don't pull that face."

With that, Charles looked at his watch and hurried towards the door.

"Damn it! I'm going to be late for my interfaith prayer morning with Imam Rabinowitz and Rabbi bin Laden."

CAMILLA STOOD in the oak-panelled Duke of Ellington drawing room and looked warily at the green bottle Barkworth had

delivered. She took a tentative swig from it and instantly spat it out. God, it was disgusting, she thought, like the medicine Nanny Mainwaring used to make her drink in the nursery when she had a tummy ache. Well, she wasn't drinking any of *that* muck!

Without thinking, Camilla emptied the whole bottle into the flowering Columbian Anaconda which stood in a marble pot under Charles' favourite watercolour *"Donkey by Moonlight – Near Cairo 1981"*.

Too late, she realised what she had done and she could already hear Charles' voice as he came through the door telling Fitztightly to take his wellington boots off and "be smart about it".

What could she do? Any minute now he would be wanting to test his tincture! But suddenly she had an inspired idea...

Charles threw himself into his Louis Walsh XIV chair and sighed heavily.

"What a day! I thought the Imam would never stop. And as for the Dalai Lama for goodness sake... By the way, old girl, did that Duchy tincture come? I could certainly do with a shot of it. Those toxin chaps are playing merry havoc with old Chazza's insides."

Camilla sprang to her feet and presented him with a silver tray on which stood ready the green bottle and two Waterstone crystal goblets – a present from Sir Tony O'Looney, the Irish entrepreneur, after a fascinating Royal visit to the workshop in County Kilroy.

Charles beamed with pleasure as Camilla poured out two full measures of the translucent fluid.

"It says on the bottle, Chazza, patients should down it in one."

"Really...? It is usually to be taken in very small doses three times a day..."

"Not this one. Bottoms up!" Camilla insisted. Charles did as he was told, gulping down the proferred tincture.

"Phew! Gosh! You know, it tastes a bit like... gin. Quite a kick."

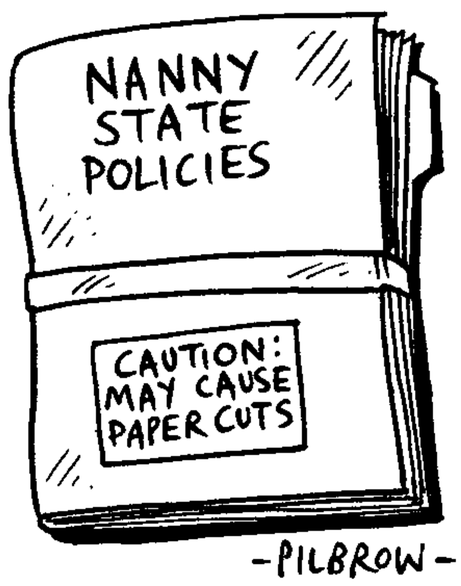
Camilla's eyes wandered back to the half-empty bottle of Gordon's Bankers' Ruin on top of the drinks cabinet.

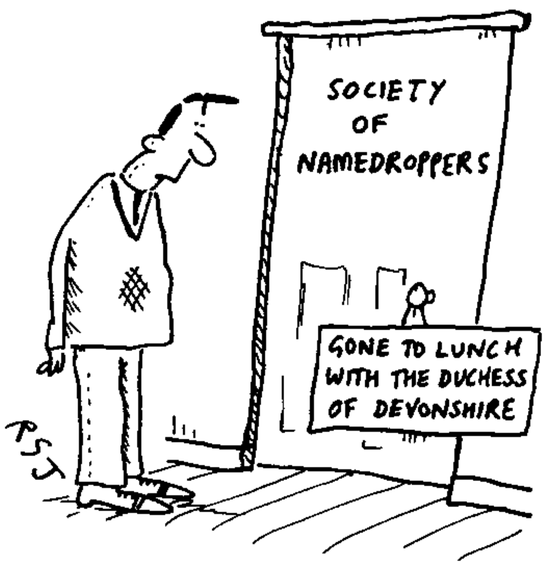
"Yes, I thought so too," she agreed. Charles relaxed, suffused with a warm glow, and the thoughts of his difficult day receded. He contentedly wiggled his toes in his Royal monogrammed Duchy slippers.

"Tell you what, old bean, I think I might have another of those Cettles and Nelery Elixir thingies. Mmm... you see, those professorsh don't know what they're talking about. This stuff is bloody marvelloush."

What was it his old friend and mentor Sir Laurens Van Der Post had said that night under the Rumbabwe Desert sky? "A little bit of what you fancy does you good." How true that was, how very true that was.

(To be continued...)





"Blimey! Things are worse than I thought"

Remembering the 'Myners Strike'

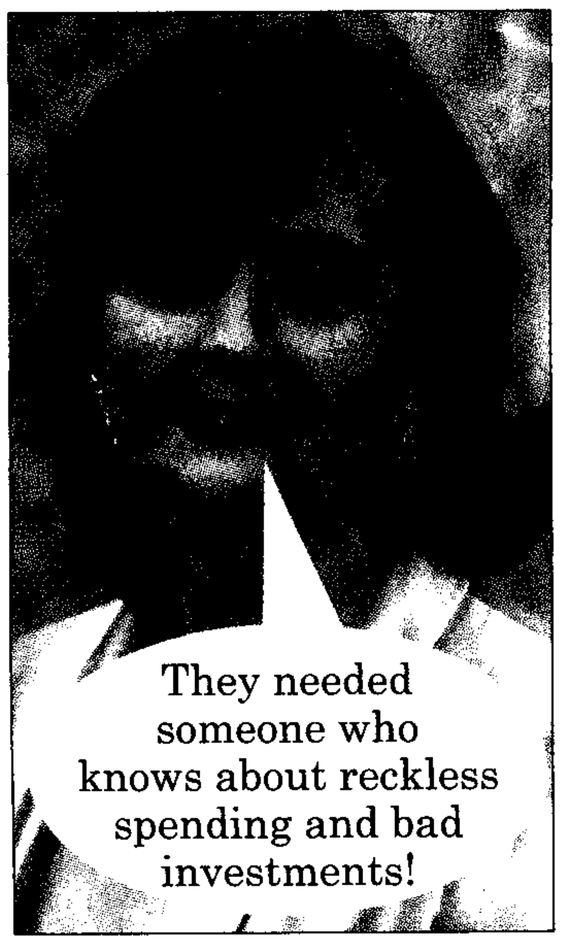
WHICH of us, who witnessed first hand Lord Myner striking a deal with the RBS board over Fred Goodwin's pension, could have foreseen the years of bitterness and rancour that were to follow.

Whole communities were devastated as one by one once thriving banks pulled up the shutters and thousands of bankers were thrown onto the scrap-heap.

Who could forget their cries of "Cold Champagne not Dole" as riot police on horseback fought running battles in the streets with Harriet Harman outside Sir Fred Goodwin's Edinburgh home... *(cont. for 5000 words)*

"Not bad... a bit preachy"

CHERIE QC TO ACT AGAINST BANK



The Evidence Of SIR MAX MOSLEY To The Commons Culture Media And Sport Committee – Chairman, SIR JOHN WHIPPINGDALE MP

Whippingdale *(for it is he)*: It is very good of you, Sir Max, to give up some of your valuable time to answer our questions today.

Sir Max: As it happens, I am missing a very important engagement this afternoon in Mayfair.

Whippingdale: May we enquire what the nature of this engagement might have been?

Sir Smacks: It is a private matter.

Rosemary McCaner MP *(for it is she)*: You mean, you have not told your wife?

Sir Smacks: Precisely. Not that I am ashamed of what I would have been doing with Ms A, Ms B and Ms C. It is just that it is, as I say, a personal affair and of no concern to anyone else, least of all the pornographers of the News of the World.

Whippingdale: You mean these people, Sir Smacks?

(Holds up copy of News of the World with headline "F1 Boss In S&M Nazi Sex Orgy Shock")

Can you tell us how you felt when you saw this headline at your breakfast table?

Sir Smacks: It is impossible to describe how painful it was.

McCaner: I thought that is what you liked?!

Sir Smacks: Don't interrupt, schweinhund!

Whippingdale: We do apologise, Sir Smacks. I can see you are clearly distressed by the memory of this appalling revelation.

Sir Smacks: Imagine my feelings, ladies and gentlemen, after 45 years of being a respectable sado-masochist, suddenly to find my dignity is stripped away and I am dragged through the gutter.

McCaner: I thought that was the bit you liked!

Sir Smacks: I haf told you vonce before, Englischer pig dog... shut up or I vill be forced to haf you shot at dawn!

Whippingdale: I must apologise, Sir Whacks, and I speak for all the members of the committee when I assure you that you have our heartfelt sympathy. Clearly, the irresponsible and wicked press have overstepped the mark and must be brought into line before they start looking into the private lives of all of us. Not that I have anything to hide, I hasten to add, and I think I speak again here for all members of the whole House.

All: Hear, hear! Good old Sir Whacks!

Whippingdale: So may we conclude this enquiry by congratulating you, Sir Whacks, on your brave campaign to ensure that all journalists in Europe who have ever written about you are locked up in a dark dungeon with German wardresses to keep them in order with suitable implements of correction.

McCaner: Hang on, isn't that what you enjoy?

Smacks: DUMBKOPF!!! (Screams). I am not ashamed or embarrassed in the least. Like my late father, I am only concerned with the freedom of every Englishman to be locked up in a dungeon for most of the war like he was.

Whippingdale: Spank you very much indeed.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Wendy Richard, star of *EastEnders*

So. Wendy Richard
Star of *EastEnders*.

"I can't believe
I'm hearing this."

Yes, that was
Your catchphrase.

I echoed the
Same thought
When I heard
You had
Passed away.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

TV Highlights

BBC1	8.00pm	Gavin and Stacey
BBC2	9.00pm	Horne and Corden
BBC3	9.30pm	Gavin and Corden
BBC4	10.00pm	Horne and Stacey
BBC1	10.30pm	Jonathan Ross with Gavin and Stacey's Horne and Corden
BBC2	11.00pm	Graham Norton with Horne and Corden's Gavin and Stacey
BBC3	11.30pm	Corden and Corden
BBC4	12.00am	Horne and Horne

(That's enough Horne and Corden, Ed.)

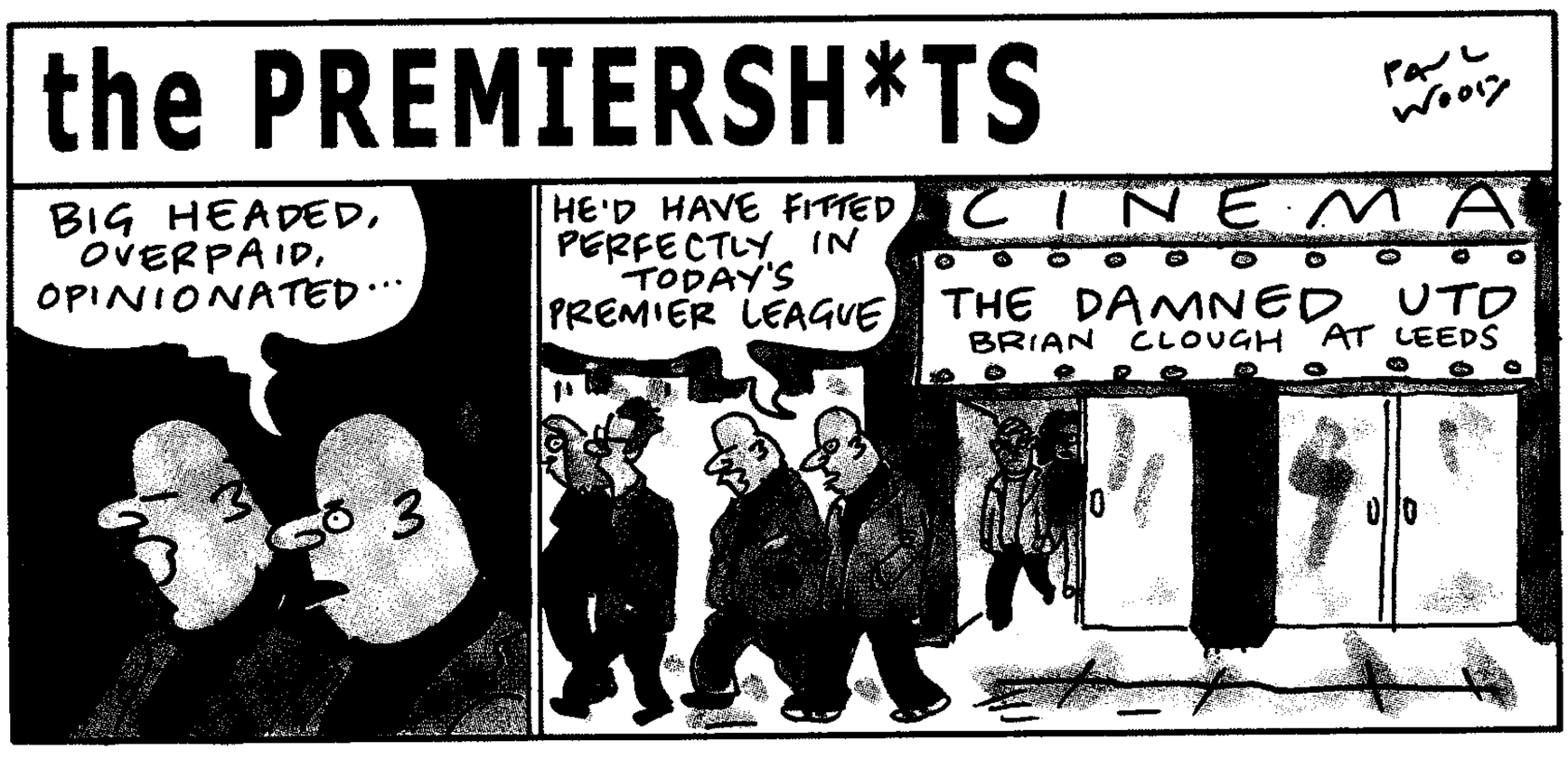
Radio Highlights

BBC7 Round the Horne and Corden

(I said, that's enough. Ed)

Film Highlights

Shaun of the Dead Similar Lesbian Vampire Killers with TV's Corden and *(I really mean it, you're fired. Ed)*



Advertisement

GNOMEBY'S
LONDON

A collection of Lucan memorabilia, formerly the property of the 94th Earl of Lucan

LOT ONE
Rosewood and tulipwood desk. Some slight bloodstains. No key for secret drawer. **Estimate £13,000**

LOT TWO
Length of lead piping (2ft 6ins or 37 euros), bearing the legend "The Property of Thames Water. Do not remove". **Estimate £25,000**

LOT THREE
Fine hessian mail bag, hand-stitched and suitable for carrying large items i.e. body of wife. **Estimate £32,000**

LOT FOUR
Box of cassette tapes – collected speeches of the late A. Hitler, some very worn. **Estimate £5.35p**

LOT FIVE
Pack of De la Rue playing cards backed with crest of the Claremont Club. Many cards marked in top right-hand corner. **Estimate £78,000**

LOT SIX
Autographed letter from Mr L.G. Furniss, assistant manager of the Cadogan branch of Coutts and Co., informing the late Earl that he was "*slightly overdrawn to the sum of £800,000... an early settlement would be appreciated at his convenience... Yours respectfully*". **Estimate £10**

LOT SEVEN
The Blue Guide to Mozambique by Colonel Heinrich Witgenstein. Much thumbed. Some pages missing. Inscription "Be lucky, your old friend, Jammy Fishpaste". **Estimate £36,000**

LOT EIGHT
One small black novelty moustache "The Groucho". **Estimate 25p**

GNOMEBY'S
That's your lot!

MY BATTLE WITH THE HELL OF ADDICTION

by Julie Myexson

At first it seemed innocent enough. Almost a laugh. Just experimenting to see what it was like. But all too soon it became a habit. And then a terrible addiction that would threaten to destroy my family. I just couldn't stop writing about my children.

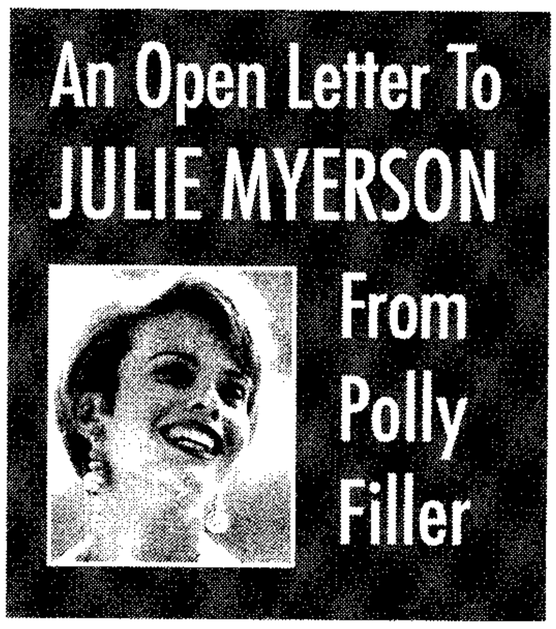
It started with the odd piece in a newspaper. Then it got more regular, more and more pieces, then a column and then a book and then another one.

My family tried everything to stop me. Rows, threats, blackmail – none of it worked. They even changed the locks on my study but I smashed the door down and wrote even more articles.

Eventually there was no option but to try the "Tough Love" technique that American experts recommended. No matter how much I adored my computer (as only a writer can) I had to take the ultimate step and throw it out of the house. So I did.

But then, only five minutes later, I relented, ran into the street, pulled it out of the gutter and brought it back inside, hoping that this time I wouldn't relapse and just write yet another piece about my family.

But I did. And here it is. Will this do?



Dear Julie,

We've been friends for years, but I have to tell you frankly, Julie – this time you've gone way too far. Yes, you're a writer like me. Yes, we all need to make a living. But Julie, no... you mustn't exploit your family simply to fill up those column inches. I know it's hard, but as I said to my toddler Charlie when he was asked to leave St Duncestan's for setting fire to the class hamster, "Don't worry, darling, I would never write about you and embarrass you in public just because you've done something funny." And you know what? He took off his shorts and showed everyone in Caffè Nero his little pink bottom! Bless!!

Later, I asked my partner Simon what he thought about your behaviour, Julie, and whether he thought you had betrayed your loved ones.

And you know what he said? Nothing. He just lay there uselessly in front of the TV, drinking lager, smoking dope and giggling inanely at *Heston Blumenthal's Extreme Vomiting* on Channel More Four Plus Four Extra!!

So, I'm sorry, Julie. The Filler Jury is against you. I, and I suspect millions of others like me, won't be buying your book. Instead they'll all be buying *"Take The Mummy and Run – A True Life Account of Polly Filler's Ghastly Family!"* (£19.99 Johnson, Johnson and Johnson Books).

With love,

Polly.

A message from the Mayor of London
Boris Johnson

What ho! Now listen up to this wheeze! You know the little green chaps, not the ones in the flying saucers, but the other ones on the traffic lights? They are the ones who come on when you are allowed to cross the road without being run over by yours truly on his bicycle?

Well from now on the little green chap is only going to be on for a couple of seconds! So you'll have to dash across and not dawdle about on the zebra crossing eating crisps and yabbering into your mobile!

No. This way Bojo is not only going to speed up the traffic, which is pretty whizzy, but he's going to get Londoners FIT as they scarper across the road trying not to get killed by the bendy buses which I haven't abolished yet – ooops! – so get your running shoes on Grandma and when the Green Johnnie flashes up run for your life – literally!!

Bojo

MODERN INN SIGNS

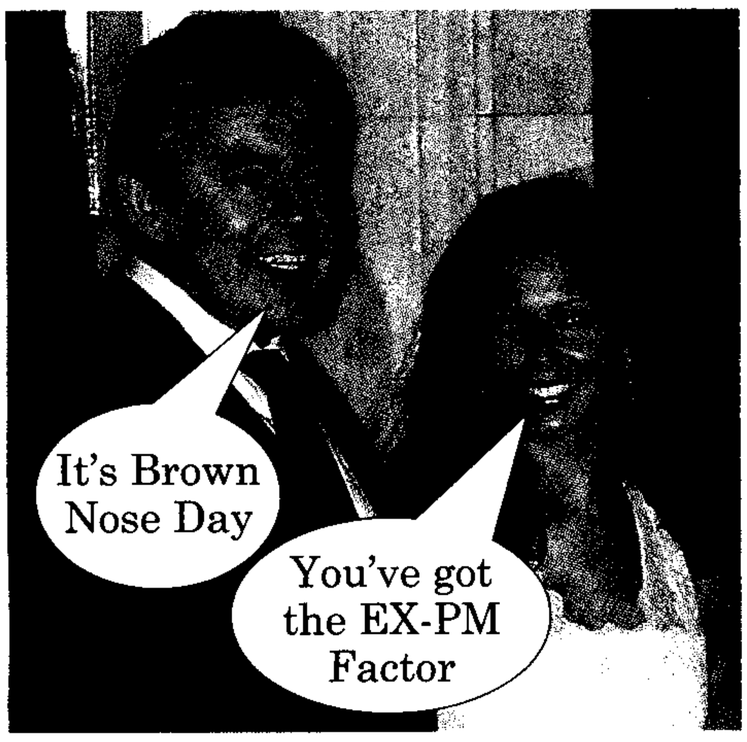
Is This The Face Of Shakespeare?

A SENIOR BBC executive has made an astonishing discovery of a new portrait of "the greatest artistic genius in the history of the world".

With his trim beard and penetrating gaze, it seems likely that this is the famous "Beard of Avon" rather than, as experts previously thought, the Regional Head of Paperclips at BBC North.

But some critics dismiss the new portrait as unconvincing. "How anyone could mistake this nonentity Shakespeare for the amazing and brilliant Alan Botney is a mystery. This is the man who has given the world such masterpieces as *"Midsummer Night's Repeat"* and *"As You Don't Like It"*.

COMIC RELIEF
Gordon sucks up to celebrities



TV HIGHLIGHTS

Q.E.

BBC1 Friday 9pm

Hilarious panel show where Stephen Fry postulates the nonsensical notion that the Bank of England should begin printing billions of pounds of banknotes so that it can buy up billions of pounds of its own debt.

■ **Eye Rating:** Quantitative Easing! It's the Zimbab-way to go.

What The Bank Of England Bought This Week As It Began Quantitative Easing

Two billion pounds worth of public and corporate debt in the form of 2, 5 and 10-year bonds.

What The Bank Of England Should Have Spent The Money On

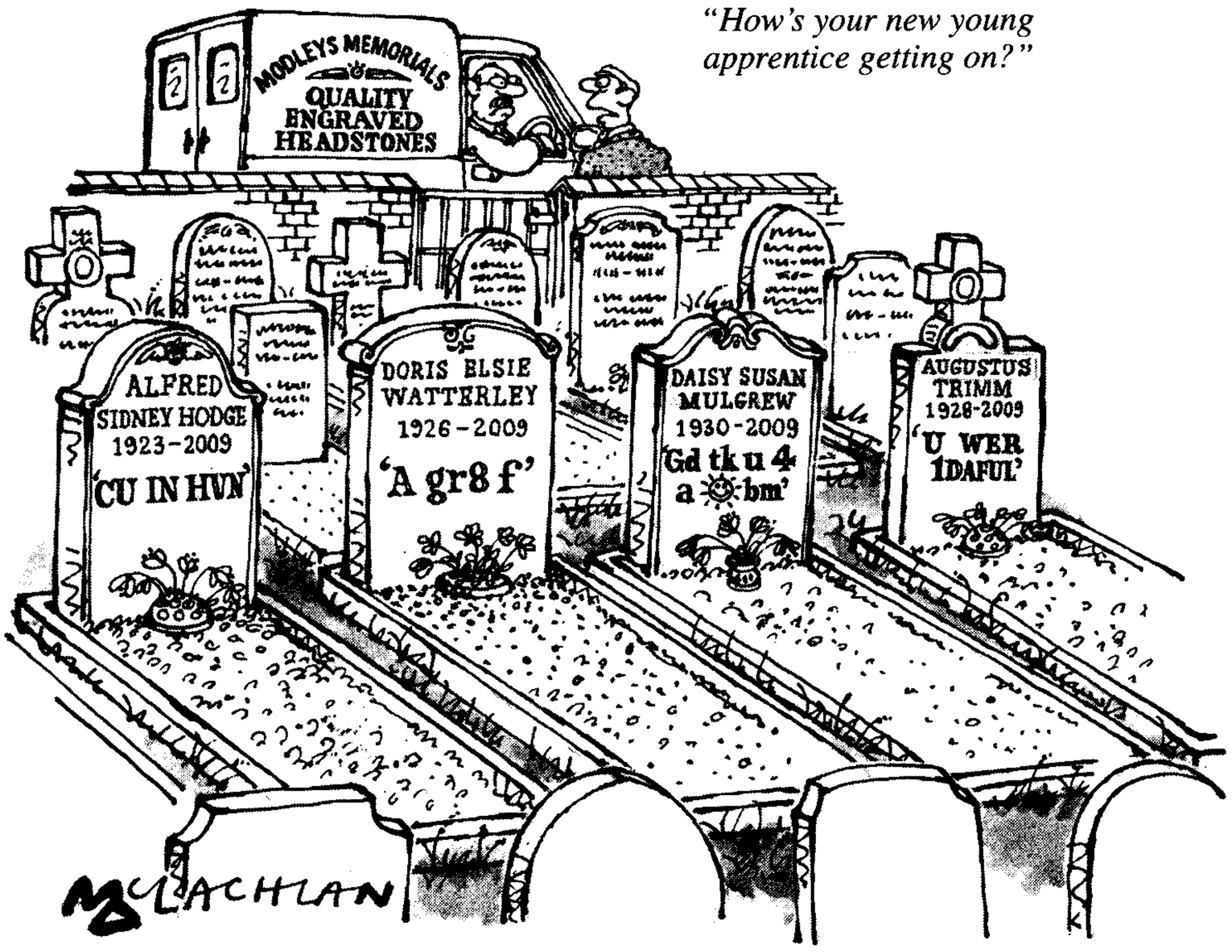
Two billion pounds worth of tickets to see Michael Jackson at the O_2 Arena. (Now worth £900 trillion on e-Bay.)

News In Brief

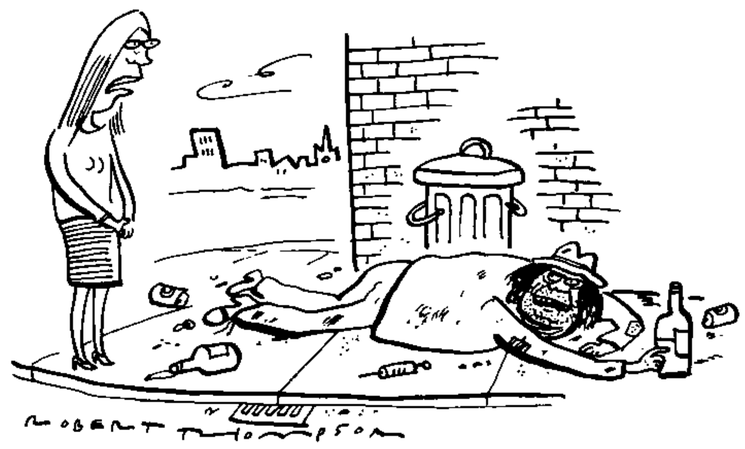
EX-CITY WORKERS FAST TRACKED INTO TEACHING

Late News

■ Hundreds of schools go bust


MODLEYS MEMORIALS
QUALITY ENGRAVED HEADSTONES
ALFRED SIDNEY HODGE 1923-2009 'CU IN HVN'
DORIS ELSIE WATTERLEY 1926-2009 'A gr8 f'
DAISY SUSAN MULGREW 1930-2009 'Gd tk u 4 a bm'
AUGUSTUS TRIMM 1928-2009 'U WER 1DAFUL'
MCLACHLAN

"How's your new young apprentice getting on?"



"Yes, but it's becoming more than an evening tipple isn't it, Nigel?"

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Gay ducks won't mate with sole remaining female

The Arundel Wetland Centre did no more than bring in the two male blue ducks to mate with the only female to save the species from extinction. But the males did no more than ignore the female and court one another. Inasmuch and insofar as they did so do, then they did no more than Onan, who did no more than spill his seed on the ground. – ***Mr Salmon***

Wildlife experts agree that homo-sexuality is rife in the duck community. It is, in effect, "natural". But would it kill them to mate with this female just once? Do they not realize that their selfish attitude means there will be no more gay ducks either? One of them will live to regret his short-sightedness, when his partner dies and there are no gay males left. – ***Robert "R"***

i sed it befor wen there was the book with the gay pengin's bring-ing up the baby pengin an then the reel life gay pengin's in the zoo got marryd an adopt-ed the abandend baby pengin's now the duck's r gay 2 its not natral an its spread-ing like wild flower – ***Darling_Deneyze***

them duck's want shootin ● ● our boys come home FROM iraque TOO this!! – ***Red_White_and_True***

agree 1000 persent redwite funny how the muslim fanatic's ar'nt protesting about "THIS" ● ● they say they are against homosexialty "BUT" there happy for english duck's to go gay and extinct. it wuld be a difrent story if the duck's was muslim's from pakistarn. – ***Broken_Britan***

the lady ducks self-steam must be so low she is the only fe-male in the country and she cant get a donald duck – ***Hunny_pot***

gorden brown set's the worse example in the paper it say's ther was a lesb-ien hen night at number 10 downing's street? so now the hen's r goin lesb-ien an the duck's r goin gay? soon ther wil b no duck's to eat an no egg's 2 eat ● an even gay human's need 2 eat? – ***Hayley_321***

i dont get it? brick obama won in the electing "BUT" gorden brown is stil in charge? – ***Yummy_Mummy8***

DIARY

SARAH FERGUSON, DUCHESS OF YORK

So many thoughts were running through my mind as I arrived at the premiere of *The Young Victoria* starring Queen Victoria as Emily Blunt.

I probably shouldn't say this – me and my big mouth! – but I felt so proud as I took in the scene that night. Proud that I had managed to make a dream come true. Proud that I had finally managed to make the world aware of one marvellous little lady who went by the name of Queen Victoria – or Her Maj, as she preferred to be known!.

Frankly, not many people these days have ever heard of Queen Victoria – and I was determined to remedy all that!

So who exactly was the young Victoria? My intensive research taught me that not only had she climbed her way up the greasy pole to become Queen of All England, but she was also far from the dowdy old boot-faced frump of popular imagination. The young Victoria was in fact a beautiful person with flowers in her hair, porcelain shoulders, great legs and truly galumptious boobs, a fun-loving chick who liked nothing better than hooting with laughter whilst flirting unashamedly with all the dishiest blokes in the room! She was one helluva young lady who adored going down to the local town square to literally stuff herself with barbecued bratwurst in a bun – and lots more ketchup for me, please, Albert!

All these thoughts crowded into my mind as I arrived at the cinema last week. It had taken fifteen years to get there. Fifteen years of building a belief that the story of the love between Victoria and Albert just HAD to be told.

So how did it all start? It was in the second year of my marriage to Prince Andrew that I first heard about this least-known of all monarchs. The more I researched her, the more I became aware that Victoria had never once appeared on television or radio, had never agreed to guest on a chat show, and had never even attended a Royal film premiere! It's so easy to take these things for granted, but I wanted to truly understand what it felt like to be deprived of these necessities.

I lost count of the minutes I spent researching her story. I sat in the hushed atmosphere of the Royal Library for what seemed like an hour. I left a few minutes later with an overwhelming sense that the story of the young Victoria would make a wonderful film – a film she would undoubtedly have made herself if only she'd had the contacts.

One of the key things I uncovered during my research was that Victoria had become Queen of England at a very young age – and had managed to remain Queen all the time until she died. And as a Duchess myself, I felt I had a duty to let the rest of the world into this truly extraordinary secret which had been kept undercover for a century, which is, as everyone knows, nearly a thousand years.

Instead of a childhood filled with the bestest kind of great big huggy-hugs, the young Victoria had to cope with a starchy, no-can-do, hands-off atmosphere of stuffy, po-faced courtiers telling her do this, don't do that: no, you can't get your rocks off with all the hunkiest blokes on the disco floor of Kensington Palace; no, you can't have a bit of fun going skinny-dipping in the Balmoral pond when there's a hoity-toity, tutty-tutty garden party in progress; no, you can't let it all out with a jolly good scream in the middle of a formal dinner party for the President of Snooty-Land, even if you are feeling stressed-up.

But Victoria wasn't the kind of girl to let a rulebook stand in her way. "No way, José!" she exclaimed,"I'm out to have fun!" One of my totally favorito scenes in the film is when the Young Victoria gets a fit of the absolute gigglies when her chewing-gum shoots out of her mouth while she's talking to the Archbishop of Canterbury, a very senior vicar at that time! And the next minute, she's standing up to the German Prime Minister Adolf Hitler, telling him straight up that no way is he going to invade England, not while she's Queen. It's that kind of period detail – fun and laughter, yes, but also quite a few tears – that makes the whole film such an emotional roller-coaster!

The young Victoria's life, it seemed to me, really began the moment she saw the super-sexy Prince Albert in his skin-tight figure-hugging uniform and thought to herself, "Hmmm, tasty! You know what? I want some of that!"

The couple fell head-over-heels in love, and simply adored driving around the little country lanes near Windsor in his fast car on hot summer days. They loved each other totally, and uncovering that really was revelatory for me. The more I read about her – and in the end I finished an entire biography, non-swanks! – I couldn't believe how their love was so exactly like my own love for Andrew.

As couples, we were like peas in the proverbial i-Pod. Victoria and Albert used to eat meals together – and so did me and Andrew. Victoria and Albert used to sometimes go out together – and so did us. Victoria and Albert stayed married until the day he died – and so did me and Andrew, or nearly. Victoria wrestled the whole of her life with weight issues bound up with a lack of self-confidence – and so do me. And, just like I, Victoria eventually went to live in the United States of America, where the people respected her honesty, admired her for her amazing work with WeightWatchers and literally took her to their hearts. The list goes on and on.

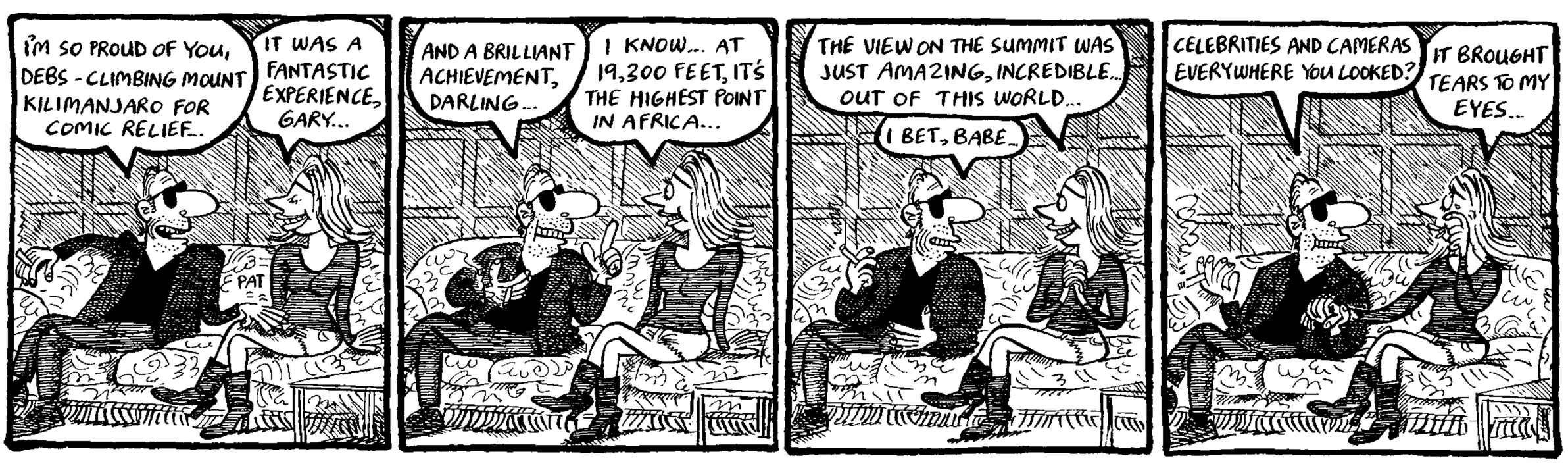
And my research also uncovered the fact that Prince Albert was not just a heart-throb – the Robbie Williams of his day – but that he was also a literally amazing scientist, the inventor of all sorts of things to which he lent his name, like the Albert Bridge, the Royal Festival Hall and Alberto Balsam shampoo for problem hair.

From the very beginning, this film was so close to my heart. But I was soon to discover that being a co-producinger is not an easy job! Far from it: it involves slogging your way through the script, or as much as you can of it, time permitting, and then, what seems like years later, making it to the World Premiere on time. But it was worth the sweat just to be on that red carpet, ready to pay tribute to that poor, misunderstood young lady who the world called Her Majesty but who for me was still just Vicky, the lovable little girl with the great mop of red hair who kept putting her great big foot in it! Welcome to Planet Victoria! Welcome to Planet Sarah!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


I'M SO PROUD OF YOU, DEBS - CLIMBING MOUNT KILIMANJARO FOR COMIC RELIEF...
IT WAS A FANTASTIC EXPERIENCE, GARY...
PAT
AND A BRILLIANT ACHIEVEMENT, DARLING...
I KNOW... AT 19,300 FEET, IT'S THE HIGHEST POINT IN AFRICA...
THE VIEW ON THE SUMMIT WAS JUST AMAZING, INCREDIBLE... OUT OF THIS WORLD...
I BET, BABE...
CELEBRITIES AND CAMERAS EVERYWHERE YOU LOOKED?
IT BROUGHT TEARS TO MY EYES...

Literary Review

Hirst impressions

Lucky Kunst: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art
Gregor Muir
(Aurum, £14.99)

The $12 Million Stuffed Shark
Don Thompson
(Aurum, £14.99)

THERE is something rotten in the world of art, and it's not just Damien Hirst's decomposing shark, though that seems an apt metaphor for the whole business. These two books, without necessarily meaning to, tell us why.

The shark in question is a 15-foot tiger shark which Hirst bought from an Australian fisherman for £4,000 in 1991. It was transported to England, suspended in a glass tank full of formaldehyde, given a pompous title ("The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living") and sold for £50,000 to Charles Saatchi, who displayed it in his gallery to howls of tabloid derision and the delight of the arty-farterati.

All this is gleefully recounted by Gregor Muir in his insider's account of the rise and fall of the so-called Young British Artists who came to prominence in the early 1990s. Muir was not a YBA himself but he had dabbled in art and hung about with them, much like a failed musician will hang about with pop stars in the hope of getting backstage passes and a sniff at the fairy dust of fame (which makes your nose bleed).

Don Thompson comes at the subject from the opposite direction. As an academic economist, his interest in art is limited to its properties as a luxury market commodity. His book recounts how, little more than a decade after its "creation" by (or rather on behalf of) Hirst, the stuffed shark was being offered for sale at auction in New York at the jaw-dropping price of $12m. That was apparently the second highest sum paid for the work of a living artist, and almost certainly the highest sum paid for a dead animal.

What's more, this dead animal was not as well preserved as it might have been: its skin had gone green and wrinkly, one of its fins had fallen off and the formaldehyde had gone murky. What had once been an iconic trophy was now ironically atrophied. That didn't stop the eventual buyer, Steven Cohen, a hedge-fund mogul from Connecticut, from parting with the asking price, much to the chagrin of Nicholas Serota, who had hoped to net the shark for a mere $2m on behalf of Tate Modern. (The original shark has since been replaced, with no loss of the authenticity it never had.)

All this perhaps goes to show that the consumers and producers of contemporary art more or less deserve each other, and if their antics now seem rather quaint and absurd, perhaps that's because the world has some rather bigger and nastier economic fish to pickle.

Meanwhile, concept art has gone the way of the concept album; and, as Thompson points out, the economics of the contemporary art market never quite stacked up: "Eight out of ten works purchased directly from an artist and half the works purchased at auction will never again resell at their purchase price." As a result, many of those collectors who enthusiastically outbid each other for works of contemporary art viewed as must-have status props when "branded" auctioneers and elite "gallerists" were offering them for sale at ludicrous prices have now been left holding potentially valueless assets. They must feel like a right load of bankers.

Muir's book, with its cheeky title, is essentially a bit of overheated rock journalism posing as art criticism. It suffers from all the faults of those "you should have been there" chronicles of youthful excess that used to clog up the bookshops, purporting to celebrate the golden age of rock 'n' roll at variable levels of literary competence. And this is, oddly enough, rather appropriate. Back in the 60s, all the pop stars had come out of art school. A generation later, popular music was all but dead, its "revolt into style" degenerating into the revoltingly stale, and all the art students wanted to go into advertising. It was just that the only product they wanted to advertise was themselves.

Muir has plenty of name-check anecdotes about his chums Sarah (Lucas), Sam (Taylor-Wood), Gary (Hume), Tracy (Emin), Jake and Dinos (Chapman), and their entrepreneurial circus ringleader, Damien. While claiming rather pompously to have been an "important player" in the YBA movement that brought him so many free drinks, he also makes exalted claims for the art itself, presenting it as a revolutionary flowering of talent in the artistic wasteland of post-Thatcherite Britain. "London was in the grip of artistic paralysis," he asserts, blaming the "rigidity of the existing art establishment" and its enfeebling dependence on public subsidy.

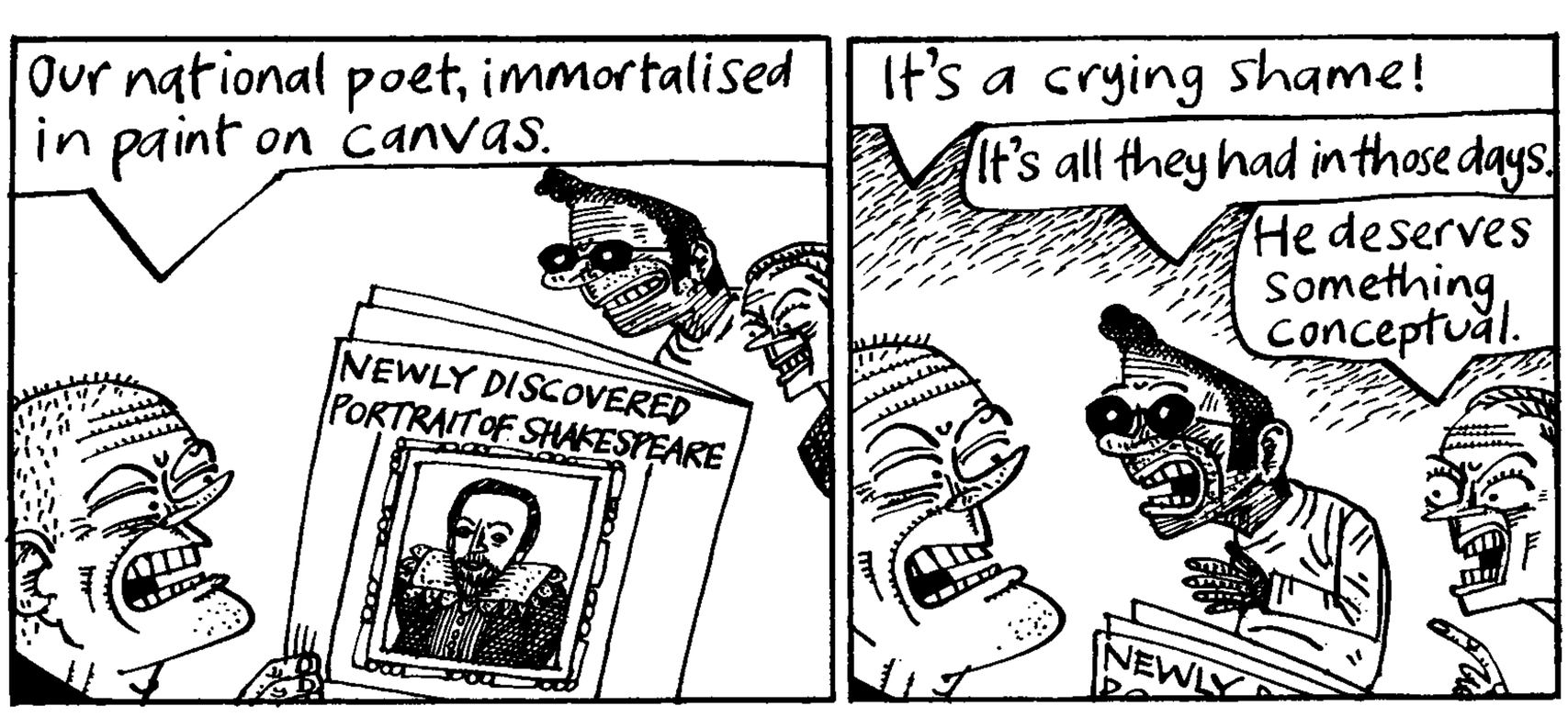
But later on he is forced to concede the importance to the YBAs of such influential old farts as Gilbert & George (in London) and Jeff Koons (in New York), who taught them the value of combining kitsch, smut and banality in their work, and to accept that as conceptualists (or even "recontextualists") the YBAs were not exactly the newest kids on the block. Still, who cares if they're not original when you can have stories about Jake and Dinos getting into a pub brawl, or Gary nailing a potato to the wall of a gallery and suggesting it be offered for sale as an artwork, or Sam wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Fuck, Suck, Spank, Wank", or Damien getting drunk and shouting: "I fooking hate art!"

At one point Muir claims: "We were quite unlike any other group of artistic individuals operating anywhere else in the world," but anyone who has ever got drunk in a student bar will beg to differ. What emerges from these pages, despite the frequent use of descriptions such as "iconic" and "groundbreaking", is the weary unoriginality of it all.

The art historian Ernst Gombrich once said: "There is no art. There are only artists." But from Muir's book it would seem more accurate to say that there are no artists, there are only arseholes.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


Our national poet, immortalised in paint on canvas.
NEWLY DISCOVERED PORTRAIT OF SHAKESPEARE
It's a crying shame!
It's all they had in those days.
He deserves something conceptual.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

Strangers
Anita Brookner
(Fig Tree, £16.99)

SHE had always known that it was her destiny to write novels. For a time the substantial presence of art had threatened to interpose itself, but ultimately even this impediment had faded away and the true summit of her ambition lay unignorably before her: tantalising, vertiginous, exact. And so the novels had been written, a shelf of them at least, with a regularity that to her public denoted merely a mastery of her material, but which to certain of her critics hinted only at a uniformity of subject matter. She was not distressed by these insinuations, for she belonged to a generation that considered intimations of both praise and blame unworthy of one's notice.

They were very grave and elegant books, stately in their phraseology, civil in their intimations, well-nigh Jamesian in their syntactical arrangement, decorous in their converse and quite devoid of that insensate relish for physical relations in which the modern novelist delights. In their form, so in their content, for they concerned a class of person perennially overlooked by her contemporaries: modest, genteel people, quiet in their habits, sober in their amusements, timorous even in their vexations. Their subject was loneliness, their theme endurance, their vice similarity.

Occasionally her publisher would venture the mildest of remonstrances.

"Miss Brookner," he would say (she liked the habitual deference of his address), "has it never occurred to you to put in a little, let us say, *demotic* into your books, you know, the kind of conversations that people actually have?"

She considered this request carefully. It was to her like the sound of rain falling far off, upon distant thoroughfares, but capable of intruding upon her own vicinity.

"No," she said finally. "It has not."

"I see. And don't you think – forgive me my impertinence, Miss Brookner – that your readers might sometimes like you to address one or two of the issues of the day instead of all this stuff about sad old people in Kensington?"

"No," she said, somewhat perplexed, "I do not believe that they do."

"And there's nothing I can do to convince you not to keep on writing what is effectively the same book but just changing the details a bit?"

"There is nothing," she said, a trifle sadly, "nothing at all."

"Well then," he said. "We shall just have to carry on as we are."

Curiously he found himself consoled by this display of adamantine resolve. Everything was cyclical. Reading this in Proust he had not quite believed it. Now he knew it to be true.

Literary Review continues overleaf ☛

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ PLUGGING his new novel *Paths of Glory*, based on the life of mountaineer George Mallory, Jeffrey Archer regaled *Independent* readers with tales of "My Life In Travel".

"My first holiday was going to visit my aunt in Leeds," he recalled. "My memory is of travelling up there in a motor car, probably for the first time in my life, with my grandmother. She didn't realise that roundabouts – which had just been invented – were for going around, so she proceeded to drive over the top of every single one of them. It didn't seem to worry the old girl, God bless her." His favourite drive? "The Pass of Brander in Scotland, where the Campbell Clan killed everybody; it is one of the most beautiful roads on Earth."

The first roundabout in Britain, in Letchworth, was built in 1909, 31 years before Archer was born. To be fair, he may be thinking of mini-roundabouts – which would mean wee Jeff's first trip in a motor car came when he was 29, and the prospective parliamentary candidate for Louth.

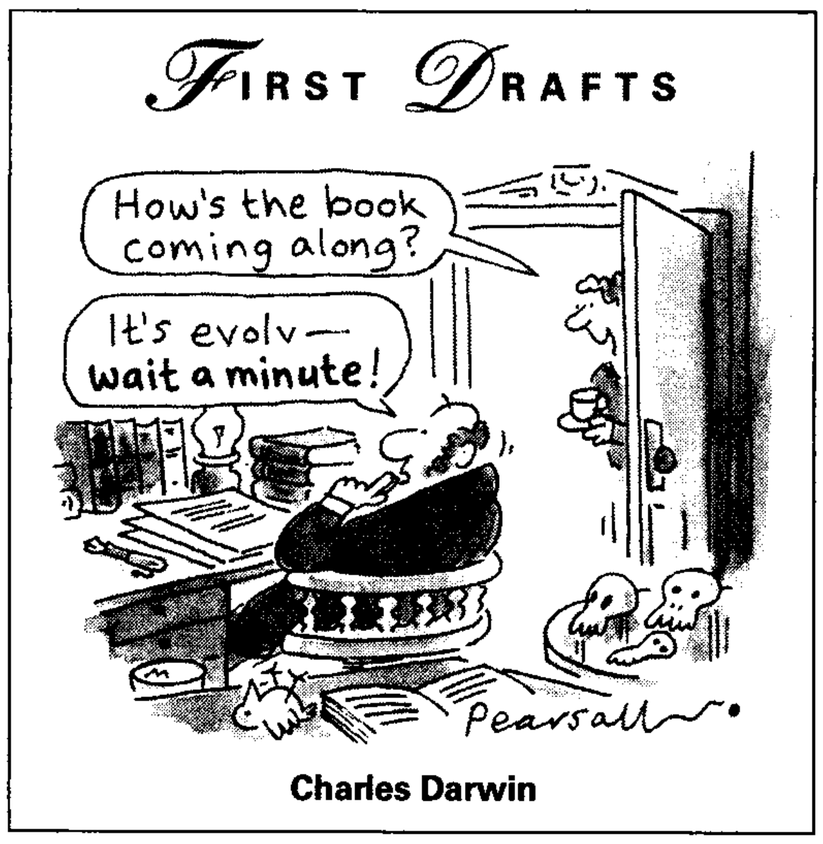
The Pass of Brander, meanwhile, was the site of one of Robert the Bruce's great victories in the Scottish War of Independence in 1309. The episode in which "the Campbell Clan killed everybody" occurred nearly four centuries later in 1692 in Glencoe, an hour and a half's drive further north.

■ RUTH PADEL's bid to be Oxford's Professor of Poetry is evidently coming along nicely.

The contest (decided by graduates' votes) coincides with the double Darwin anniversary, and as his great-great-granddaughter, Padel has cannily exploited this by producing a collection of Darwin-related verse. She has never won a major award, which puts her at a significant disadvantage with the Nobel laureate Derek Walcott as opponent; but her campaign presents the former Oxford doctoral student as the candidate equally at ease with scientists, writers, artists and humanities dons, at once poet, classicist and writer about natural history.

If voters hunt out two earlier collections, however, they will find this assiduously rebranded contender is also an author whose work raises the same questions as Julie Myerson's – about the legitimacy of incorporating others (unnamed, but easily identifiable) in confessional writing.

Rembrandt Would Have Loved You and *Voodoo Shop* chronicle a globe-trotting affair with a well-known journalist, writer and Radio 4 panellist, and contain candid thoughts about her rival, his long-term partner. Plumping for Padel could be seen as a vote for verse that publicly washes, not just the poetess's dirty linen, but other people's.



■ AN unseemly kerfuffle broke out at the normally sedate German Historical Institute last week when David Irving, the convicted Holocaust denier and bankrupt, turned up at Bloomsbury Square to hear a lecture on Himmler.

As the organisers dithered over what to do about their embarrassing guest, Irving, accompanied by a very young and blonde companion, took matters into his own hands. He strode confidently to take front-row seats – right under the nose of institute director Andreas Gestrich and lecturer Peter Longerich, author of a book on Himmler and an expert witness for the other side in Irving's failed libel trial against Deborah Lipstadt back in 2000.

Longerich and the director tried to ignore Irving, even as he vigorously shook his head at the mention of 5m to 6m dead in the Holocaust. But afterwards, when he stood up to invite everyone for a post-lecture glass of wine, Gestrich said, without glancing down at his unwelcome guest: "Holocaust deniers are not welcome."

"Name names. Say my name," retorted Irving. "You don't mind having my books in your library – why not throw those out too? Why don't you name names?"

As the director went pink and the audience booed Irving, an unidentified man at the back leapt to his defence. "I am a Holocaust denier too. What about me? What about my name? I can prove it. You can Google me." Not wishing to be upstaged, Irving shouted: "Why do you have my books in your library? I have reputable publishers but I am not welcome for a drink?"

Apart from Irving's "mate", the audience had by now headed off for their wine, leaving him with his blonde. Will Irving's next book – also on Himmler – make it into the institute's library?

■ A SPAT has broken out over a *Times Higher Education* article highlighting the failure of a new guide to GM food, *Making Sense of GM*, to disclose its industry connections.

Tracey Brown of Sense about Science, publisher of the guide, condemned the *THE* article as "mischievous" and "rude" and claimed it relied on "tortuously indirect links" between the authors and the GM industry.

But the *Eye* has a copy of an unpublished draft of the guide – and it seems it wasn't just the industry links of some of its authors that didn't appear in the final published version. One of the guide's listed authors, Andrew Cockburn, is also missing. Who he? None other than GM giant Monsanto's former director of scientific affairs, and a figure so controversial that when Tony Blair invited him to author part of the government's official GM science review in 2003, it led to questions being raised in the House and the resignation of one of the expert panellists.

No wonder Sense about Science felt erasure was the better part of valour.

■ "I FIND no evidence of a special relationship when I go to America," declared Jeremy Clarkson in his *Sunday Times* column last week, regaling his readers with details of transatlantic misunderstandings culled from "Rowland White's amazing new book *Phoenix Squadron*".

One other special relationship of which *Sunday Times* readers could find no evidence was the one between Jeremy Clarkson and Rowland White. Although Clarkson didn't think to mention it, White is the non-fiction commissioning editor at Michael Joseph, which publishes Clarkson's seemingly endless stream of bestselling dad-pleasers.

■ THE apparently frivolous business of the People's Republic of Hay-on-Wye and self-appointed "King of Hay" Richard Booth's impending defenestration (*Eyes passim*) has a serious point.

The "dethroning" – confirmed at a meeting last week – is an attempt to ensure an effective succession, and is very much in Booth's own humorous spirit, with an announcement about the appointment of state executioner promising "an attractive package, including travelling expenses and luncheon vouchers".

Thankfully, festival director Peter Florence is sympathetic, keen to ensure the happy co-existence of festival and town and happy to discuss various options with the booksellers.

However, the booksellers also have to combat a dangerous attitude in the local tourist quangos. At a recent meeting of the great, the good and the bloody awful, the suggestion that "the 'Town of Books' image is strong but may be damaging tourism prospects" was accepted without a murmur, with the phrase "dusty old books" even making an appearance.

The tourist officials seem not to realise that this is Hay's unique selling point. Without "dusty old books" and smelly old authors, would anyone be coming to Hay at all?

'Bookworm'

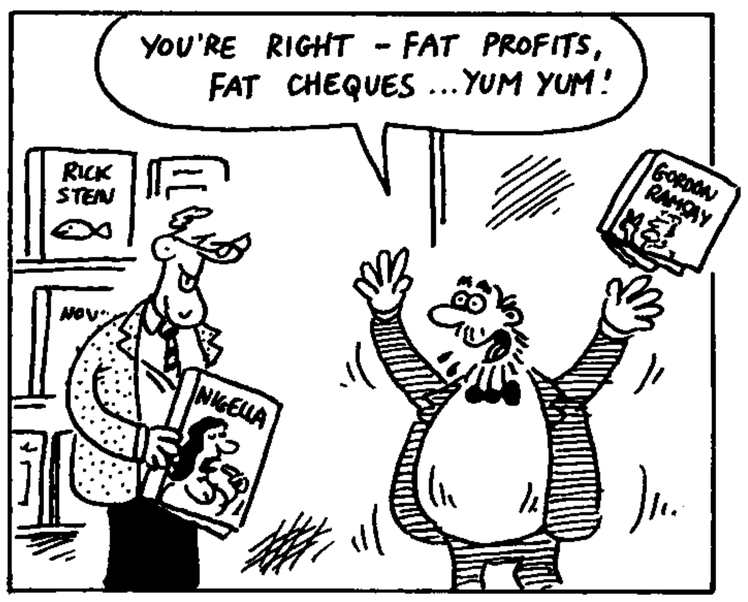
OH, YEAH? "I am *not* a man people love to hate." – Jeffrey Archer, *Cambridge News*.

LIBRARY NEWS

■ THEY'VE certainly got their rose-tinted glasses on at the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The quango responded to this month's annual library statistics by celebrating "a 20 percent rise" in people using library resources without visiting their library – such as renewing books or finding upcoming events online.

"Fears that these changes would be made at the expense of library buildings themselves is [*sic*] not borne out," announced the MLA, apparently unworried by the "small decline" in the number of actual libraries last year (there was a net loss of 19), since they are being consolidated into "sparkling new libraries".

In fact the figures, from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, show that despite the shimmering new architecture, there are millions fewer books available to the public. In just one year, the total national stock of library books fell by nearly 2 percent, while other items such as CDs and DVDs also fell in number.



Pseuds Corner

He [Stephen Gerrard] is so omnipresent, so bound up in every move on the pitch and nuance off it, that he sometimes seems less like a player and more like a conductor; Sir Georg Solti rousing the orchestra in the final stages of Mahler's Fourth Symphony...

MATTHEW SYED, *The Times*

The life I lead is very autobiographical

MORRISSEY, interviewed on Radio Four's 'Front Row'

Civilisation's greatest single invention is the sentence. In it, we can say anything. That saying, however, is difficult and peculiarly painful. Whether we are writing a novel or a letter to our bank manager, we have the eerie sensation that we are not so much writing as being written, that language in its insidious way is using us a medium of expression and not vice versa. The struggle of writing is fraught with a specialised form of anguish, the anguish of knowing one will never get it right, that one will always fail, and that all one can hope to do is 'fail better', as Beckett recommends. The pleasure of writing is in the preparation, not the execution, and certainly not in the thing executed. The novelist daily at his desk eats ashes, and if occasionally he encounters a diamond he is likely to break a tooth on it.

JOHN BANVILLE, *Guardian*

...a Proustian rampage through the debris of a music that happens too quickly for clarity...

JOHN WATERS on the new U2 album, *Irish Times*

For me, hats aren't an accessory, they are the raison d'etre of an outfit. They don't just make you look pretty, they take you somewhere else; they can change, destroy and create emotions.

Milliner STEPHEN JONES, curator of the first V&A show devoted entirely to hats, *Independent on Sunday*

For the past 35 years or so, I've not carried a wallet. In the 1970s, I decided that money does not mix with my philosophy, ideology or spirituality, so I decided I wouldn't touch it ever again.

That's not to say I haven't picked up the odd penny from the floor. I believe that if you don't pick up a penny, you're not worth a penny. I have a ritual: I put the penny in my shoe because I believe it brings you good luck. When I have about five or six, I pour them round my olive tree, which I got as a gift from the late Yasser Arafat.

YURI GELLER, *Sunday Times 'Money' Section*

Cultural Transfer by a Commodious Vicus of Recirculation

Title of the Queen's University Belfast Annual Irish Studies Lecture, to be given by Professor JOEP LEERSSEN of the University of Amsterdam

What keeps you awake at night?
The thought that in my kitchen drawer I may have left a fork in the knife compartment.

GREGOR MUIR, *Royal Academy Magazine*

CONTRIBUTORS: Craig Wallace, Philip Spencer, Christine Rush, John Hopwood, Andy Ward, Anon, Fionola Meredith, Suzanne Ricketts.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

UNISON IN THE NORTH

The MP, the activist and a union at war

PUBLIC sector union Unison has been accused of illegal Labour party funding and other financial irregularities which helped secure the election in 2005 of the union's former president, Dave Anderson (above left), as MP for Blaydon on Tyneside.

These serious allegations have come to light in the row currently engulfing the trade union over its treatment of Yunus Bakhsh (above right; see also *Eye* 1230), the nurse and left-wing activist who discovered that his downfall – both at work and with his union – had been predicted on a nasty Nazi website by someone with insider information from Unison.

It is alleged that Paul Foy, Anderson's then agent (and now his office manager), had been taken on by Unison on a six-month temporary contract supposedly as a "recruitment assistant". But it was well known that he was in fact running the election campaign, which saw Anderson elected with a 5,335 majority.

In the week of the 2005 general election, six members of Unison's Glasgow Health branch travelled to the union's Newcastle office to help. They had use of a Unison office, computers, direct mailing and printing facilities and phone lines. None of this has been declared by either Anderson or the union. The six have been named to the *Eye*. Records also show expense claims from some of them for other trips which were illegally paid from branch funds and not affiliated political funds.

The Glasgow branch – and others, it is alleged – were also regularly illegally funding so-called "Labour link" activities out of branch funds.

When the claims were put to Anderson, he told the *Eye*: "My understanding is that everything was in order and accounted for. If anything is different to that, then I need to find out as quickly as I can. Obviously I do – these are serious allegations."

Foy and Unison, however, categorically deny any illegal funding or that he carried out any election duties from the Newcastle offices while employed by the union. Foy said he took leave during the week of the election, running the campaign from a shop in the constituency. He denied knowledge of the visits from the Glasgow workers, saying: "There were hundreds of volunteers."

Unison said Foy was seconded from the local authority to run a pilot project, designed to promote its affiliation to the Labour party through "Labour link", and that he was the "pilot co-ordinator". Documents forwarded by the union, however, only show proposals for such a project outlined by Liz Twist, political officer of Unison's Northern Region, in a review two years earlier.

Union insiders decided to speak out about the illegal funding following what they see as a "witch-hunt" against 48-year-old Mr Bakhsh who, as a result of anonymous allegations from fellow trade unionists of bullying and harassment, was suspended and later sacked from his job at Northumberland Tyne & Wear NHS Trust. The same allegations also went to Unison, thus denying him the support he should have had.

He was later to discover that before his troubles started, the white supremacist website Stormfront had sought "some real and substantiated dirt on this nasty piece of immigrant stock". After he lost both his job and his union role, those on the site congratulated themselves, one saying: "Revenge is sweet. Well done to those involved," while another rejoiced: "Payback time! Bye Bye Yunus. Job done!"

But Unison never charged him with bullying or harassment. Instead it sealed his union office and confiscated all his records and equipment. Later he was to face union "charges" relating to expenses, phone calls and misuse of the computer for Socialist Worker political activities. Mr Bakhsh maintains he gave a full explanation of all the irregularities put to him, but was unable to prove his innocence because the union still held all his records.

It is this perceived hypocrisy and injustice on the part of the union which is causing serious unrest at the most senior levels. Mr Bakhsh is known as a man who, when on union business, would rather stay with a friend in London and claim minimal expenses than join colleagues running up bills in expensive hotels. One told the *Eye*: "I don't share Yunus's politics. I often disagreed with him, but what has happened to him at the hands of the union is complete hypocrisy and is nothing short of disgraceful. I can no longer keep silent."

When Mr Bakhsh himself tried to get hold of some of his old union's accounts (to help clear his name), he ended up receiving a county court writ alleging non-payment of a union bill of nearly £1,000 – the supposed admin fees incurred by the union for making the records available to him. He had been warned there was an hourly charge of £31.50 and that he would have to travel to London – even though it was northern accounts he wanted to see. His bill included the travelling costs of those summoned from the north to supervise the visit. In the end the county court judge halved the bill, but to Mr Bakhsh it looked as if the union was trying to price him out of his right to inspect the accounts.

Could this have been because they contained matters Unison would rather he hadn't seen? In August last year, he wrote to Steve Tasker, the union's finance director, asking him to investigate, among other things, a series of discretionary one-off payments to union officials of sums of between £200 and £900. Mr Bakhsh alleges they were made in contravention of union rules.

Concerns over the possible misuse of union funds in Glasgow led to details of branch finances being posted around the city centre. They were also forwarded to the *Eye*. Activists were apparently pocketing daily amounts of £35 and £45 expenses – some claimed in advance. Some £11,000 in union Asda "welfare" vouchers was not properly accounted for. All of these matters would appear far more serious than anything the union has found when taking apart Mr Bakhsh's office.

There will now be demands for a full scrutiny of Unison's political activities and funding, especially now that Liz Twist is seeking the Labour party nomination to contest the new Houghton and Sunderland South seat.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£2m "Additional" government cash for malaria research pledged by Gordon Brown when Kilimanjaro-climbing celebs visited No 10 for Red-Nose day

£3m Additional cash UK government is obliged to put into malaria research by 2010 under terms of UN summit last September

£2m Spending on entertainment and hospitality by Department for International Development since 2003

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In no hurry

"IT IS not in our interests to see someone whose conviction is unsafe remain in prison," said a prosecution source last week after it emerged that Sean Hodgson had been locked up for 27 years for a murder and rape he did not commit. "We supported Mr Hodgson's defence team and moved very quickly on this."

As *Eye* readers well know, this is the exception, not the rule. Too often in miscarriage of justice cases, the prosecution makes it as difficult as possible for those whose convictions are unsafe to get out of prison.

Mr Hodgson, wrongly convicted in 1982 of strangling Teresa de Simone, aged 27, was, like many victims of injustice from Stefan Kiszko to Barry George, the local misfit with mental health problems. But new forensic testing has established that the DNA found on Teresa's body was not Hodgson's.

Now the crown prosecution service (CPS) might like to "move quickly" to review the conviction of Andrew Malkinson, serving a life sentence for a double rape in 2003. He was convicted after his victim, who was beaten and seriously sexually assaulted as she walked home in the early hours, picked him out as her attacker on a video identification parade. Another witness, who travelled to the parade in the same car as the victim (bizarrely, the parade was held in the middle of the night), initially picked out someone else but later said she had meant to pick out Malkinson.

Malkinson had claimed he had been in bed asleep at the time of the attack. He had been arrested later after two police officers claimed he fitted the description of the attacker. He bore no sign, as the police admitted, of the scratch the victim claimed to have made on her attacker's face.

The most intriguing feature of the case, however, concerned the scientific evidence. There wasn't any. At trial, the CPS said this was because Malkinson had taken precautions because he was "forensically aware". Thus he is supposed to have committed a brutal rape on a particularly hot night while "sweating profusely" but without leaving even microscopic traces of forensic evidence.

DNA traces found in the area of the victim's torn nipple had been found to match the victim's boyfriend. Now the Forensic Science Service (FSS) has carried out further tests on traces of saliva staining the victim's vest. But this does not match Malkinson's DNA either. It belongs to someone unknown.

Did the CPS and FSS act with urgency to draw this fresh work to the attention of the defence? No. It took Malkinson's lawyer, Campbell Malone, time and effort to obtain the findings. To make matters worse, the FSS is demanding £1,800 (a sum it knows is beyond the jailed Malkinson's means) before it will release to him full details of the latest DNA analysis.

SO it's now official. The Ministry of Justice IT system to link offender records across the criminal justice system was, as the *Eye* has reported for years, a catastrophic disaster.

Last week the Commons public accounts committee said that among all the troubled government computer projects, the so-called C-NOMIS was "in a class of its own". Quite how the committee can, however, claim that ministers and the projects main board were unaware of the scale of the problem is quite baffling.

The *Eye* charted extensively warnings from those involved in what was supposed to be the IT backbone of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS): that it was unworkable and that its costs were spiralling out of control. It was finally abandoned when projected costs had more than doubled to £690m – and after £155m of taxpayers money had already been wasted. Now there are to be five separate systems as NOMS tries to cut costs. Brilliant!

TAX HAVENS

Off-message and offshore

"BUT how much safer would everybody's savings be if the whole world finally came together to outlaw shadow banking systems and outlaw offshore tax havens?" asked Gordon Brown grandly when addressing the US Congress a fortnight ago.

It must have slipped the prime minister's mind that under a 2002 private finance initiative contract, the offices in Marsham Street SW1 that house the UK government department responsible for ensuring the safety of this part of the world, the Home Office, are owned by... a tax haven operation!

When the offshore deal was revealed a couple of years ago, the Home Office defended it by claiming the offices were directly owned by a taxable British company. Indeed they are: but accounts now show that the company, St Annes Gate plc, pays no tax at all and is unlikely ever to do so as it can boast £106m "tax losses".

The company's actual profits of more than £15m on PFI fees of £35m a year are removed in tax-deductible interest payments at rates of up to 14.75 percent, much via an offshore ownership structure comprising Luxembourg holding companies and parent company HSBC Infrastructure Company Ltd. This latter outfit is registered in Guernsey and boasts local directors to ensure its profits stay out of the UK taxman's reach.

Just round the corner in Whitehall, meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence is in a similar position. The company that owns its £450m offices under a 2000 PFI contract, Modus Services Ltd, also hasn't paid a penny in tax to date and has £65m in tax losses to shelter future bills. It does, meanwhile, pay £9m a year in dividends to its joint owners, Henderson Global Investors and builders Carillion. That's the same Henderson that last year re-incorporated in Jersey and moved its tax residence to Dublin citing Treasury proposals – since shelved – to clamp down on British multinationals avoiding tax by using tax havens.

When proposed PFI deals are assessed for value for money it is assumed that, because they are profitable, the PFI companies will pay tax. But only little people pay tax.

Hard Timms

GORDON BROWN promised last week to "crack down on the tax havens that siphon off money from developing countries – money that could otherwise be spent on bednets, vaccinations, economic development and jobs". But did the prime minister really mean it?

He was addressing a Department for International Development (DfID) conference on poverty; yet his government's attitude to the problem is barely even lukewarm. As the *Eye* has reported, Britain's own public development fund CDC actually has *more* subsidiary companies in tax havens than in developing economies – and it shows no sign of changing.

Treasury minister Stephen Timms told parliament that DfID has "commissioned research into [how much tax havens cost developing countries] which it is hoped will be completed by the end of the year". Campaigners say that figure could be up to £100bn a year – twice what poor countries receive in aid. But the project looks like an exercise in playing down the issue.

Rather than turn to impartial civil servants to do the job, DfID has asked the Oxford University Centre for Business Taxation. Independent academics? Er, not quite. The centre, which regularly advocates lower business tax, was set up with funding from the same FTSE 100 companies that make extensive use of tax havens to extract profits from developing countries.

Moreover, as part of the Said Business School it is also supported by arms broker Wafic Said. He happens to be a Monaco tax-exile who runs his business empire through an HQ in Bermuda – coincidentally the very island in which Britain's tax offices are owned by Mapeley (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*)!

MONEY LAUNDERING

Shanks a lot

WHAT does the Financial Services Authority (FSA) have to hide about allegations of money laundering by Barclays Bank?

The information commissioner Richard Thomas ruled last year that the FSA should publish details of its investigation into allegations, first published in the *Sunday Times* in 2006, that $54m held by Barclays Private Bank had been frozen by the FSA after a police investigation into its handling of Colombian drug money.

This was the best chance the public had to learn the truth of the murky episode since the crown prosecution service (CPS) had already decided there was insufficient evidence of criminal conduct to prosecute any particular Barclays official

But now the Information Tribunal has overruled commissioner Thomas saying disclosure of the information would apparently prejudice Barclays' commercial interests. Despite acknowledging that any such prejudice would be "modest", in a bizarre judgment the tribunal chairman Murray Shanks QC judged it to outweigh the public interest in disclosure.

Minor financial risk to Barclays shareholders versus the public's right to know about a high street bank's involvement in drug money laundering? No contest!

SCOTTISH FORESTRY

Copse and robbers

PLANS to privatise large swathes of Scottish forest (see *Eye* 1228) seem likely to be dumped by the Scottish National Party (SNP) after widespread opposition.

The scheme to lease 25 percent of the land held by the Scottish Forestry Commission caused outrage. The official Scottish government consultation found the plans to be highly unpopular, while vast petitions were collected by the trade unions. Even Scottish timber companies joined the chorus of opposition, fearing that an energy company might grab the land to produce wood-fired power, creating a shortage of quality sustainable wood.

The scheme's credibility was further undermined when it emerged that the initiative for the scheme had been the brainchild of... bankers. Responding to questions in the Scottish parliament just before being re-shuffled to culture, environment minister Michael Russell revealed that: "Rothschild approached the Scottish government with ideas about the national forest estate." As he later confirmed to *The Herald*, this included "a leasing idea".

He said ministers had held two meetings with the bank and officials had had a further four between October 2007 and last July. But when asked whether the reports and advice that had been presented could be made public, Russell said the reports "remain the property of Rothschild and were prepared by them on the basis that they remain commercial in confidence".

Never mind the forests: the SNP already seems to have privatised policy-making.

FUND MANAGEMENT

Carbon cop-out

IT'S not just green custard that ministers need to beware. The *Eye* has discovered a green gravy train that might soon embarrass them too.

Back in 2006 the government's Carbon Trust – set up by Tony Blair in 2001 to promote green technology – decided to a sell a share of the business of managing its stakes in small environmental technology firms to the men running it, Jonathan Workman and Adam Bryers. In came independent valuer Pricewaterhouse-Coopers to pronounce the private equity-style fund management business created, CT Investment Partners LLP, worth £200,000. For £50,000 Workman and Bryers were duly given 25 percent of the firm.

The part-privatisation was one element in a scheme to raise up to £75m for a Jersey-based fund to be listed on the stock market and chaired by Lord (Adair) Turner. But the idea attracted little interest and the Carbon Trust settled on a government-owned company, Carbon Trust Investments Ltd, to hold its investments instead. CT Investment Partners would still keep the fund management job, though.

Having signed up to a commercial deal that didn't quite come off, with the result that their 25 percent share of the firm became slightly less valuable, Workman and Bryers might have been expected to shrug it off as the cut and thrust of private equity life. Yet when Carbon Trust chief executive and former McKinsey consultant Tom Delay decided last year to hand majority ownership of CT Investment Partners LLP to the pair, along with new managing partner Peter Linthwaite, it decided to hand them a free share to make up their loss.

By this stage the business was judged by PwC to be worth £68,000. After some negotiation Linthwaite coughed up £17,000 for his 20 percent stake but Workman and Bryers were handed an extra 15 percent, on top of their existing 25 percent, for nothing (the Carbon Trust couldn't even confirm if they were taxed on the windfall).

The deal looks a pretty decent one for the pair: in the year ended March 2008 they earned £245,000 between them from the partnership on the back of fees from the Carbon Trust of £560,000.

In 2007 the National Audit Office gave the initial part-privatisation the all-clear because it appeared to have taken place at a market price. The auditors might take a dimmer view of the latest carve-up, which clearly didn't. They might also wonder whether PwC really got their valuations right given the riches on offer, set to grow further following the announcement in November by Gordon Brown of a new £250m Qatar-UK Clean Technology Fund, to be managed by CT Investment Partners LLP.

Carbon Trust's finance director, former UBS investment banker Rosemary Boot, told the *Eye*: "The deal in the round makes perfect business sense and is designed to ensure that the taxpayer's interest is protected while positioning the partnership for success in the future." So that's all right, then.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

+35m Extra passengers third runway just given go-ahead will allow Heathrow to carry each year

-4.6m Fewer passengers flew in or out of UK airports this year than last

DEFENCE PFI SPECIAL

TRAINING

Public bending

CONFIRMING £2bn of public funding for the ailing, er, *private* finance initiative, the Treasury announced a number of urgent infrastructure-type schemes that would qualify for the money, including road widening, waste treatment, schools and hospitals.

All very "new deal" and just the sort of thing Roosevelt might have done in 1930s America. But there was no mention of the more than ailing £12bn PFI scheme under which military training is supposed to be privatized (*Eyes passim*). A Ministry of Defence spokeswoman confirmed that the deal was indeed eligible, though there are "no plans" to use the public money at the moment.

Two years ago the then defence secretary Des Browne admitted that private funding for defence training "allowed us the opportunity to make capital investment that, I candidly admit, we could not otherwise make". That's right: when the economy was buoyant, the government couldn't afford up-front investment; now that everything's gone down the toilet, it apparently can.

Such are the crazy economics of PFI, explained by the fact that two years ago the deal had to be kept off the government's balance sheet to flatter Gordon's books even though PFI would work out more expensive than public funding. Now nobody cares about the books. But scrapping the PFI would be too embarrassing, so the privatisation has to go ahead, this time using the taxpayer's own money if necessary while the same PFI middle-men take their huge cut.

Wrekin havoc

THE defence training PFI deal might have been based on a nonsensical premise, but it still received fervent support from Labour's South Wales MPs, notably Vale of Glamorgan member John Smith because the Metrix consortium that eventually won the bid (against a rival PFI deal to concentrate training at the existing RAF Cosford base) promised a new "academy" on their doorstep.

Never mind the job losses elsewhere in the country when almost all training is moved to South Wales: what matters is that Smith has a majority of less than 2,000 and regularly boasts locally of his success in winning the contract. He even tried recently to present a £1bn cost hike as extra investment (see *Eye* 1217), and failure to get the deal signed by the next election could cost him his seat.

This might explain why Smith became very hot under the collar at objections from Tory MP Mark Pritchard (see last *Eye*) whose Wrekin constituency includes Cosford and will lose out if the deal ever goes ahead.

During Welsh questions Smith fumed: "I am sure that every Welsh member of this House will condemn the honourable member for The Wrekin. I understand why he objects to the scheme: because he lost the bid. His bid did not win. I understand his protesting, but what is reckless and unacceptable is his bid to block the progress of the scheme… I am afraid that I must say to Conservative Members in particular: for goodness' sake, bring some influence to bear on him, because he is delaying a vital project."

Smith

Pritchard

In fact, as long ago as 2006 – well before Metrix won the bid – Pritchard had already said that the training deal meant "this country's defence privatisation has gone too far, and I say that as a Conservative".

SURVEILLANCE

Snoops R us

FINDING out other people's secrets is going to involve breaking everyday moral rules." So argues Sir David Omand, Tony Blair's former intelligence and security adviser, in a paper for the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR).

The IPPR, which likes to call itself the "UK's leading progressive think tank", has responded to the growing concern at the erosion of civil liberties in Britain by publishing a major report calling for, er, "intrusive methods of surveillance". The paper is in part a two-fingered response to the debate generated by the newly-formed "Convention on Modern Liberty", and calls for widespread "data mining" – ie trawling through the computer records of many innocent people on the off chance of finding suspicious activity.

It doesn't take much data mining to detect a major influence on the IPPR, however. For the report is a product of its Security Commission; and as the IPPR says, it "would like to thank EDS, Raytheon Systems Ltd, De La Rue and Booz Allen Hamilton for their generous support" of said commission.

These companies are certainly well placed to profit enormously from data mining and the creation of new databases, the identity card and other "homeland security" kit. Indeed, they may even be a little frustrated that Britain has not yet offered the same "homeland security" goldrush enjoyed by contractors in the US.

Lest there be any doubt about the sponsors' interests, computer firm EDS says it offers "terrorist monitoring" as part of its "homeland security" database work; the Booz Allen consultancy says it can be hired for "preventing and deterring terrorist attacks and protecting against and responding to threats and hazards to the nation — Homeland Security intelligence analysis, information sharing, transforming information into actionable knowledge". Raytheon meanwhile offers "innovative security solutions" and De La Rue wants to print the jolly old ID card that nobody wants.

Omand himself is well used to mixing with security contractors. On leaving government he was a consultant to the Society of British Aerospace Companies (SBAC), whose members want to rebrand themselves in a bid to join the homeland security bandwagon. SBAC has formed a new trade group to lobby for such work, called the Resilience Industry Suppliers Community, or "RISC".

Omand is also vice-president of the military think thank, the Royal United Services Institute, whose most recent "Security & Resilience" conference was sponsored by SBAC. Omand's PowerPoint slides for his presentation to that conference included five pages advertising the "RISC" contractors' trade group. Two other companies looking for homeland security work, Thales and Unisys, sponsored Omand's event. So much for "progressive thinking".

In the City

THE RUSH by tax havens to prove their "good citizen" credentials by agreeing to exchange tax information and reduce secrecy in order to avoid featuring on a threatened new and meaningful "black list" likely to be announced by Gordon Brown at next month's G20 meeting contains a large amount of posturing for international consumption.

What we have now are just intentions. The reality, in terms of delivering up the guilty and their money, may be years down the road. As always the detail is the devil. And there is still much negotiating to be done on that.

Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the rest are not just going to roll over and die, giving up all the secrets that made them among the richest countries on earth. Taxmen here, in the rest of the EU and in the US may ask, but the information will not come back by return. Even when there are agreements with all the havens, there will be still be plenty of legal wriggle room and appeal delay options over just what is tax evasion, how hard is the evidence of evasion – does it trigger assistance? – and what is covered by the agreement to exchange information.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister – who has always resisted the type of aggressive general anti-avoidance legislation used in Australia because of lobbying from big business, who are the major tax avoiders – may feel less comfortable dealing with pressure from the Swiss and EU secrecy centres such as Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg to clean up the mass of havens who fly the British flag. Britain boasts more tax havens under its notional or actual control than any other country – starting with the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, ranging out to Gibraltar and then across the Atlantic via Bermuda to the Caribbean dependencies of the Cayman, British Virgin and Turks & Caicos Islands, plus Montserrat and Anguilla. All of these are now rushing to prove what good boys they are and how they are not even tax havens!

The government's potential embarrassment factor is further increased by the fact that, courtesy of the taxpayers' rescue of Royal Bank of Scotland and Lloyds, it has inherited a substantial presence in the home-grown havens and Gibraltar, as well as in the Caribbean.

Royal Bank of Scotland International has branches in Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Gibraltar. Even more problematic, the RBS Coutts private banking operation has offices in all the hot spots – Switzerland, Cayman and Singapore, as well as Jersey and the Isle of Man. RBSI has announced a number of redundancies but still has a major offshore role with which to cause embarrassment.

Lloyds-TSB Offshore operates in the three UK havens. HBOS has operations in the Isle of Man. The nationalised Northern Rock also has a bank in Guernsey.

All these banks emphasise the legality of their operations, and those in the UK havens stress that they are targeting British expatriates who do not have to pay UK tax. But history shows that many Europeans, Americans and developing world "hot money" merchants also find their deposit accounts, internet banking and offshore trusts attractive.

As the owner of Northern Rock and the largest shareholder in RBS and Lloyds, the Treasury will want to minimise its role as a player in and beneficiary of the tax haven business. However, it may also want to ensure that Revenue & Customs gets all the co-operation it wants from banks the government controls. But allowing the Treasury to dictate that information is handed over or made available discreetly would raise big issues for the local governments. The tax haven offshoots of British banks usually have separate local boards and are regulated by local laws.

However, can those local directors defy the parent company if it instructs co-operation with HMRC? A lifetime ago, during Rhodesian sanctions, Shell and BP claimed they could not control their local subsidiaries, which were run by local directors subject to South African government diktat. That argument might not wash with Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, despite their local parliaments and courts, never mind in the dependencies. Critics would point to the Treasury/parent's ability as the only or main shareholder to sack the board.

That threat also creates a problem for the havens of how to prevent a rush for the door by customers who are afraid their secrets are about to be handed over. Billions have already moved to Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore and Panama. Hong Kong and Singapore are suggesting that they will co-operate, but there is less certainty about Dubai and other Gulf sheikhdoms, as well as Panama.

One of those watching this debate with more than academic interest will be the recently created Lord Mervyn Davies, the former chairman of Standard Chartered and now the trade minister. Standard Chartered has been an active player in the offshore world through its banks and trust companies. Its Jersey trust company has featured in several investigations involving both "hot" and "dirty" money emanating from Pakistan, Qatar and Zimbabwe. The bank is a major player in the Gulf, Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Hong Kong. But that was then and this is now.

THE NEW policy at the Serious Farce Office is to show that it is on every major fraud case that has a British end.

So an investigation has been launched into Bernie Madoff, and a preliminary inquiry into AIG, while Sir Allen Stanford is also a possibility. The problem is that in all three cases there is already an investigation in the US, where the main jurisdiction and bodies are likely to be found. So what will be left for the British courts? This is especially the case with Madoff already on his way to prison, the criminal net closing on Stanford and uproar over AIG growing daily.

As Enron proved with the NatWest Three, it is very hard to muscle into a US case when most of the evidence and witnesses are across the Atlantic and cannot be forced to come here. Whether the Madoff case will result in a trial here of suspected little helpers remains to be seen, despite Bernie admitting that he laundered money through his London office. The same goes for the AIG Financial Products operation in Mayfair, which sank the ship. Stanford is even more remote.

But what about those cases where the evidence, jurisdiction and bodies *are* here? Cases such as that of London solicitor Jeffrey Tesler, accused of facilitating corrupt payments to Nigerian officials from an international consortium building a $6bn liquefied gas terminal. The US authorities last month began proceedings to extradite Tesler to face corruption charges relating to these payments, along with another Briton, Wojciech Chodan.

The investigation into the Bonny Island project payments began in France six years ago. The French were later joined by the US authorities and the SFO. American group KBR and its former parent company Halliburton have admitted paying $180m in bribes to Nigerian officials. This year it paid $579m to settle US criminal and civil charges. Former KBR chief executive Jack Stanley has pleaded guilty to bribery and will be expected to testify against Tesler and Chodan. Meanwhile, the SFO is still on the sidelines, waiting to come on to play.

After moving to assist the French and US investigations, the SFO then began its own investigation into KBR's UK subsidiary, MW Kellogg, which had been used by Stanley to handle the payments. But with KBR and Stanley putting their hands up, it is hard to see what case the SFO will be bringing any day soon.

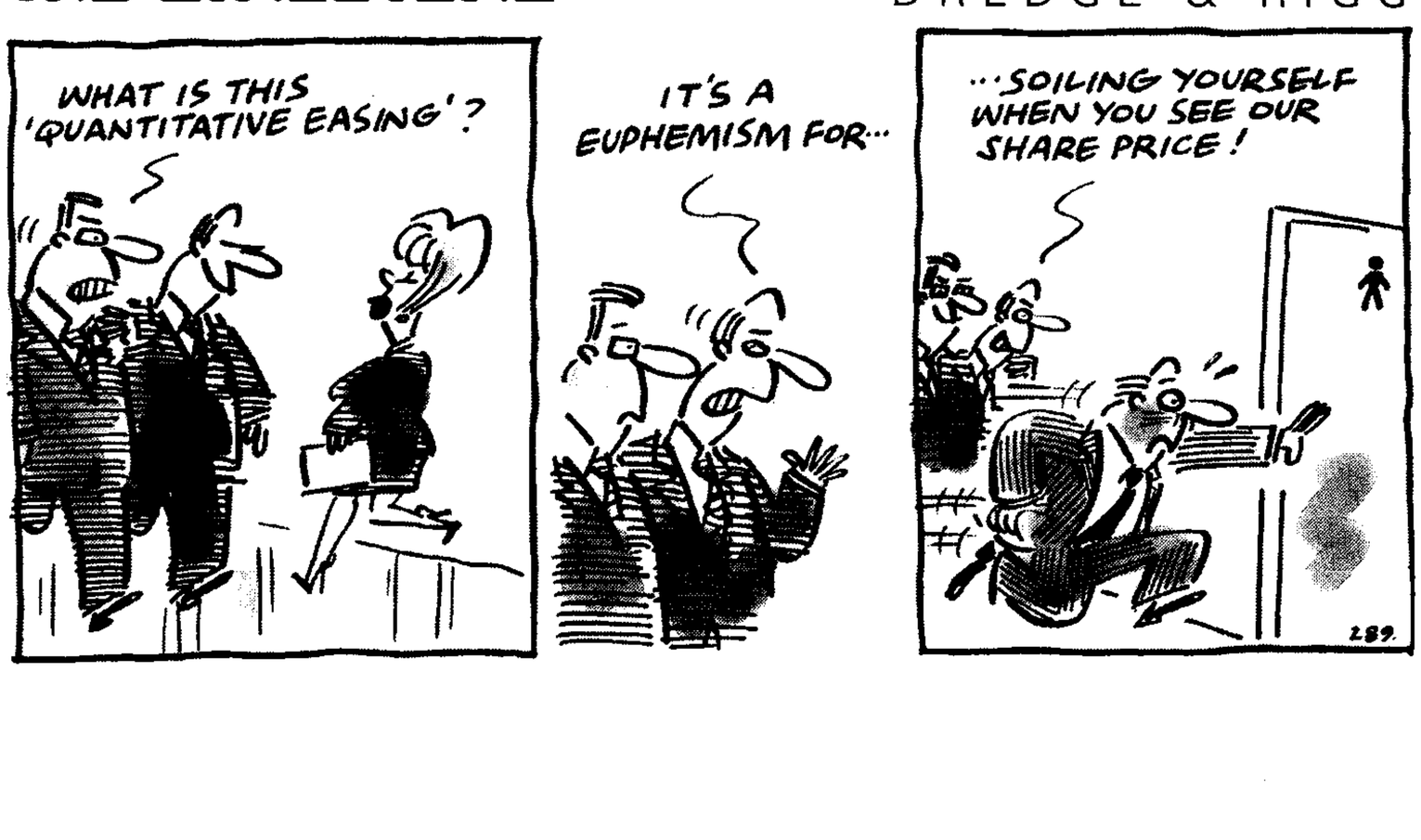
So Kellogg will probably join the Kenyan Anglo Leasing corruption case and that of Energy Financing Team in Serbia. In the past 12 months, the SFO has either dropped a proposed corruption prosecution because of the suggested poor chances of success (EFT) or ended inquiries because of a lack of co-operation (Anglo Leasing). It is further fuel to the argument that, despite the rhetoric, Britain is still soft on overseas corruption.

Meanwhile, SFO insiders anticipate that several senior officials are about to accept generous six-figure early retirement packages worth up to three years' net salary. Those to go may include assistant director Graham More, who headed the successful Independent Insurance prosecution. More, who joined the SFO in 2001 and was pictured in the last annual report, is said to have had serious disagreements with director Richard "Grey Man" Alderman. Other senior figures are said to have been asked to re-apply for their positions. There is even talk of possible claims for compensation under employment law.

But at least, if asked what the SFO is doing about major frauds, Alderman can point to the Madoff and AIG inquiries.

NEWS that the number of billionaires has collapsed by a third, according to *Forbes* magazine, illustrates once again the inherent financial flaw in such Rich Lists.

Assets are usually easy to count. Liabilities are always below the surface. But it is impossible to know how wealthy anybody is until you know how much they owe. It is like valuing a house but



"Do you ever feel we on the Left have drifted slightly from our aims when we first came to power?"

ignoring any mortgage. Deducting one from the other equals real wealth. For many in Russia, this equation is approaching a minus number because of the huge bank borrowings with which they bought their assets.

A similar salutary result can be expected when the annual *Sunday Times* list appears in a few weeks. The recession of the early 90s saw some embarrassing overvaluations – Robert Maxwell and Asil Nadir come to mind. The enforced slashing of the *Sunday Times* 2009 estimates of the wealthy – those who have not gone bankrupt – will only serve to confirm the essential fiction of such lists, which only look at one side of the individual's balance sheet.

THE 150,000 victims of the 2006 Farepak collapse who are owed close to £40m should not hold out too much hope about retribution coming from the investigation by the Department of Timidity & Inaction (now Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform). They are still waiting for their expected 5p-in-the-pound payout from the liquidation. This may happen later this year.

A more than one-year investigation completed almost a year ago did not produce any legal silver bullets. The report has been under consideration since last May. But any prosecutable case may come down to finding further evidence, such as emails, that prove the directors of both Farepak and its parent company, European Home Retail, knew it was running out of cash but carried on taking deposits from hamper savers. This could be a tough ask.

If that fails, will BERR be prepared to bring disqualification proceedings against chairman Sir Clive Thompson and chief executive William Rollason? Don't count on it now that public rage has faded. The best shot for making Thompson and Rollason uncomfortable may be legal proceedings being brought by the liquidators for recovery from individual directors. But even that is unlikely to produce any big returns, and could come more from their insurers than from their own wallets.

'Slicker'

Department of the more things change the more they stay the same.

"The banks in this country are remote from the people and the people regard them as not belonging to them but to some power hostile to them."

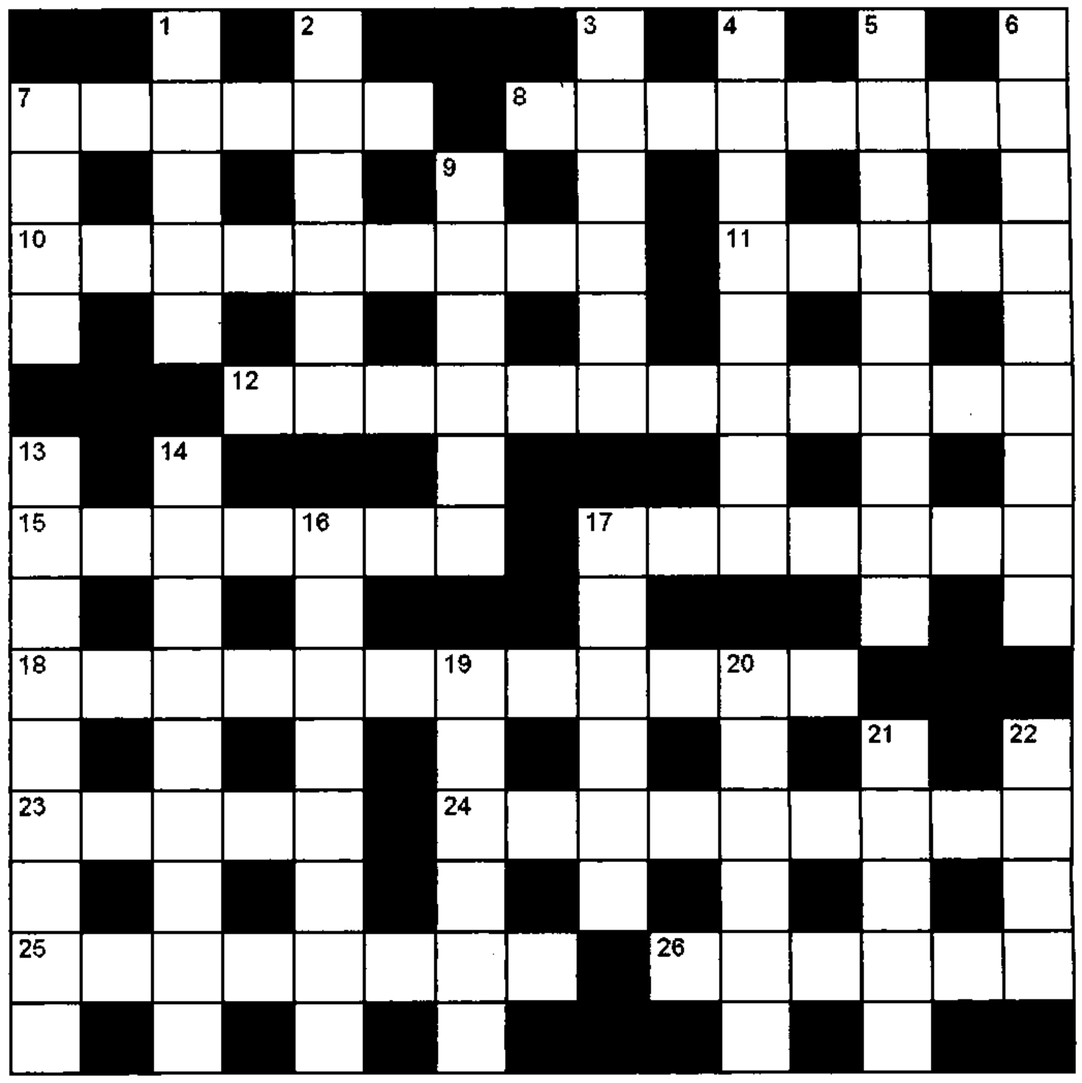
– Future US president Woodrow Wilson, addressing the American Bankers Association in 1908.

"Shocking disclosures of low standards in high places."

– Chief counsel Ferdinand Pecora, describing what had been revealed about Wall Street during the Senate Banking & Currency Committee hearings of 1933 and 1934 into the causes of the Great Crash of 1929.

EYE CROSSWORD 387

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 27 March 2009

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

7 See 11ac.

8 Endless diarrhoea after hearing rehearsal (5,3)

10 Duff ITV pollster left right out of stalemate election (5,4)

11/7 As the terrorist posed in hard hat, teeth 80% rotten? (5,6)

12 Ex-political commentator chappie nuts for our selection of boobs (12)

15 Hard one, Brown, clutching $1000 piece (4,3)

17 Canine screwed up eating hot Madras once (7)

18 Acknowledgement by champ: chances of advancement crappy in this state (6,6)

23/2 Flirted so crappily, holding back Bill, the ex-president (5,6)

24 Protected species of dildo alarm going off – date scarpers (9)

25 They're left to stick a swizzle of ice in members (8)

26 Sort of guy ignited by extremists? (6)

DOWN

1 My word! One's dropped a low type (5)

2 See 23ac.

3 Ex-president loused up – toerag! (6)

4 Mouth part of familiar Peter almost spluttering bile (8)

5 Row associated with bad economic times (9)

6 Hint: he's playing with it, so likely to be punished? (2,3,4)

7 Tonto's homilies full of bullshit (4)

9 What's Labour supposed to do, finished, trapped by Gordon's extremes? (6)

13 Entrance of Cameron's "flock": Hull sadly left out, stuffed (5-4)

14 Bollocks location for some Crufts entrants – don't expect them to win (9)

16 Ben Elton's work, earning him lots of money for jam! (8)

17 Piss-poor Conservative game (6)

19 Left and Right, etc. involved with a red (6)

20 Unauthentic, dodgy – eff off and be systematic! (6)

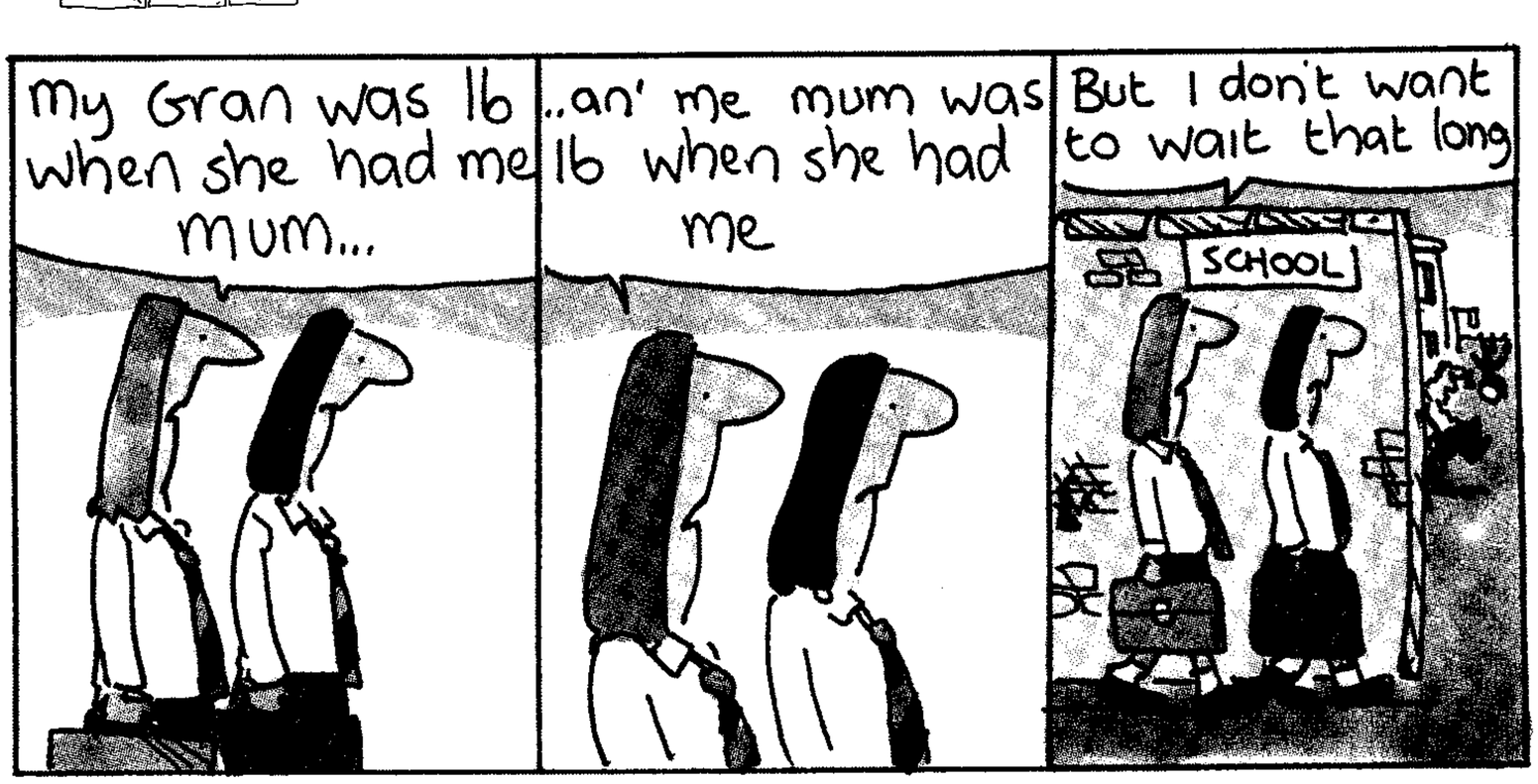
21 See 22dn.

22/21 The old PM (vacillating oily brat) welcomes aboard Mandelson finally (4,5)

Crossword 386 winner: BRIAN HARRELL

ACROSS: 1 Lamb chop 6 Capone 9 Odious 10 Clear off 11 Beady eye 12 Bondi 13 Loo 15 Bluebell 18 Teetotal 19 Gel 21 Bowie 23 Impaired 25/26 Ulterior motive 27 Psalms 28 Sinecure.

DOWN: 2 Andrew 3 Blood clot 4 Hesse 5 Pocket billiards 6 Cherbourg 7 Peron 8 No frills 14 On the piss 16 Ballistic 17 New balls 20 Beaver 22 Wheel 24 PR man.



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Pages 41-47 are – and this may be a first for a holiday brochure – devoted to Ancient Greek Philosophy. This cruise offers a delightful introduction to the foundations of Western thought and takes in numerous sites on the Greek mainland and islands, many of them unfrequented. (Note that, true to the spirit of Plato's Symposium, there are also two experts on Greek wine among the lecturers.)

More food for thought is provided by The Romans In Africa, which explores the great ruined cities along the coasts of Tunisia and Libya; The Matisse Cruise, which takes in the sites and scenes which inspired some of the greatest art of the twentieth century; and Classical Civilisations Of The Aegean, which considers the development of the eastern part of the Mediterranean, from the Minoans to the Byzantines.

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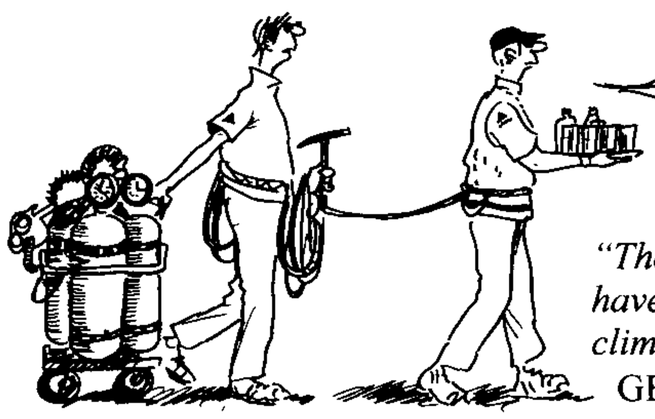

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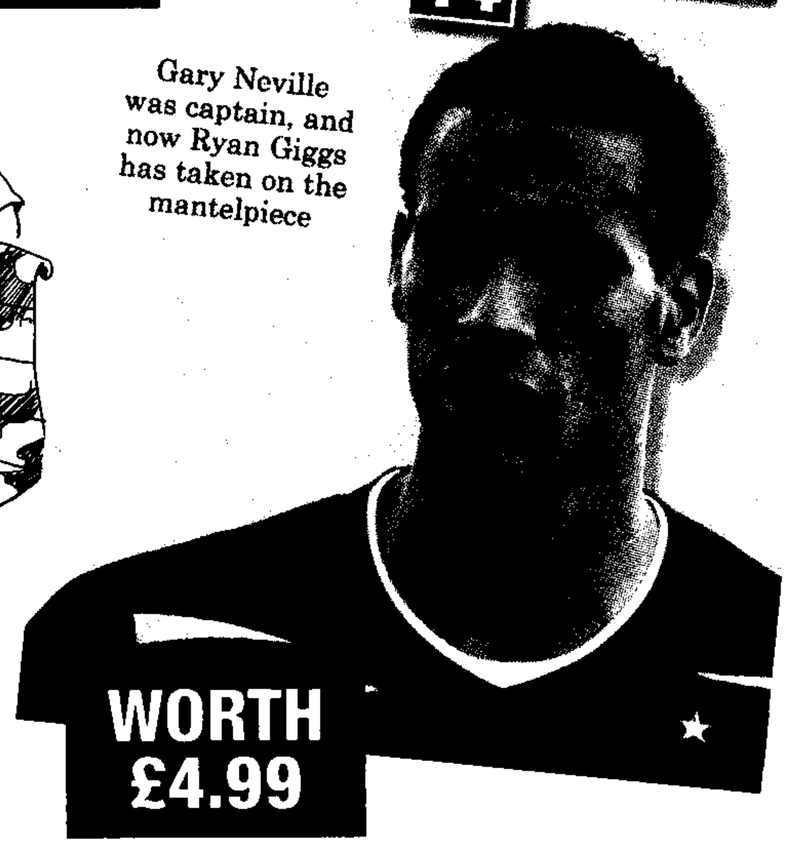

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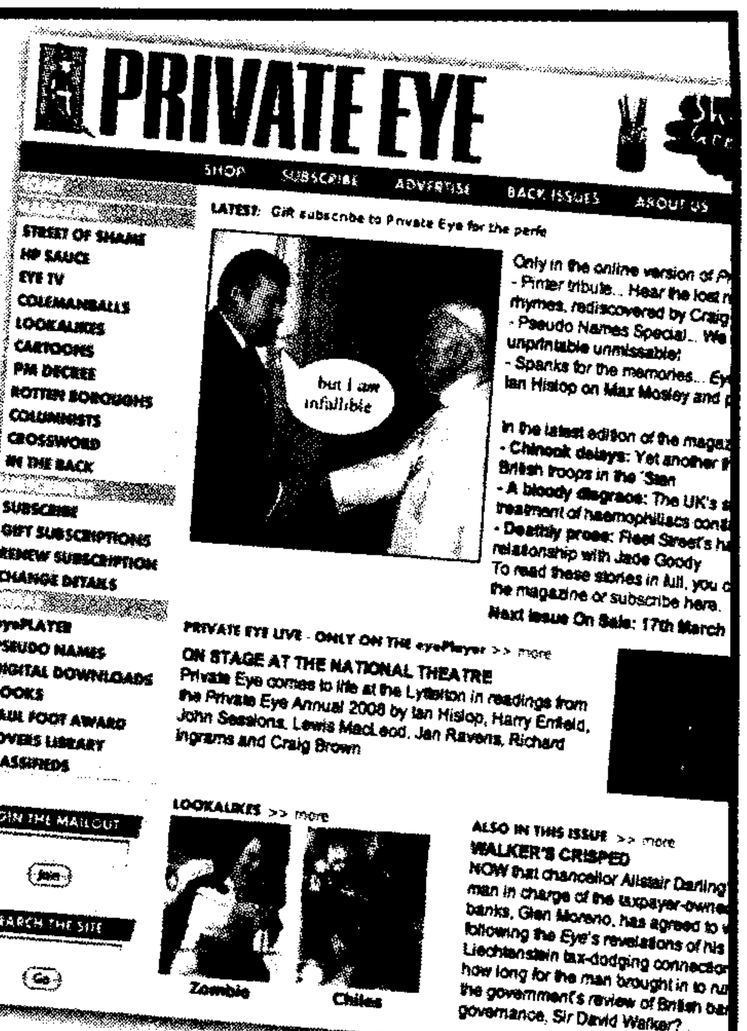

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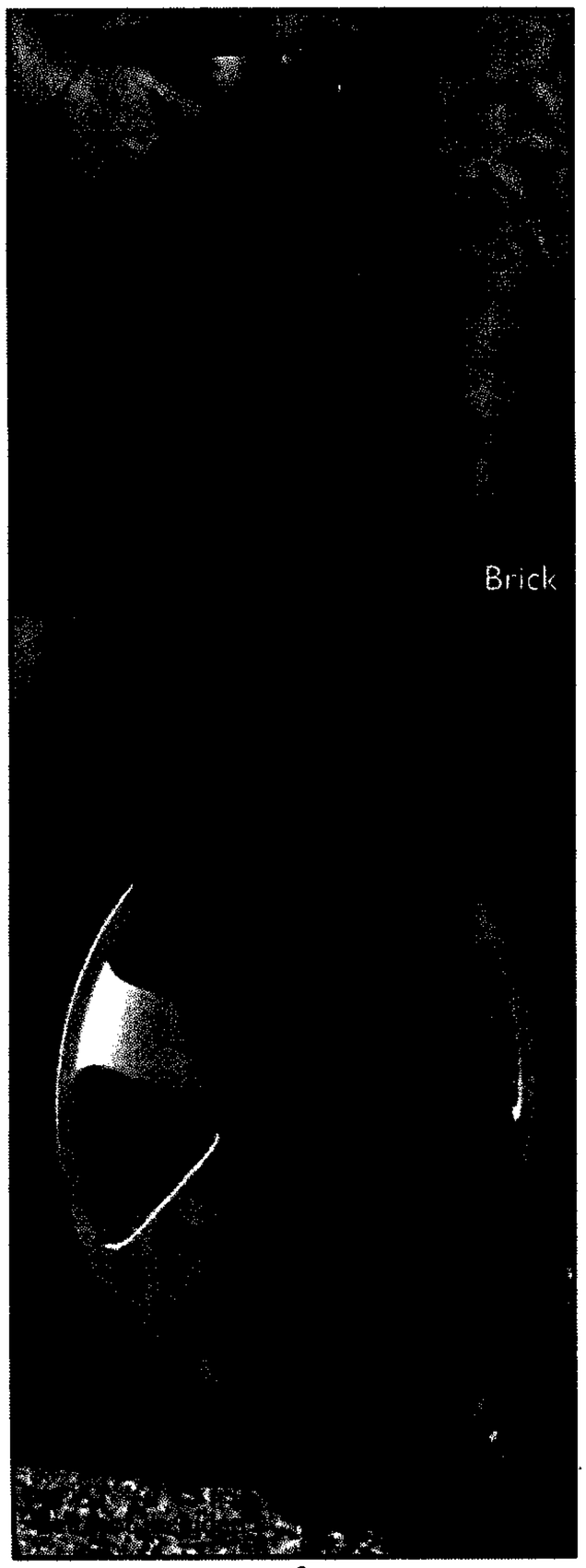

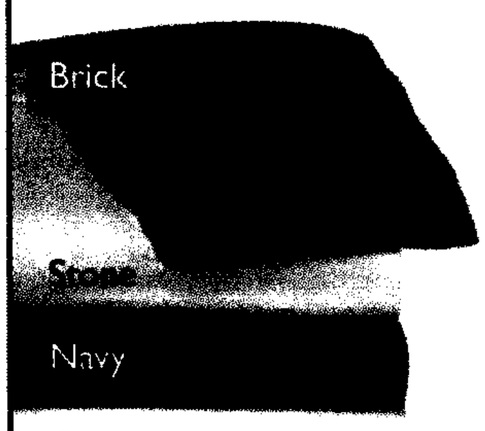

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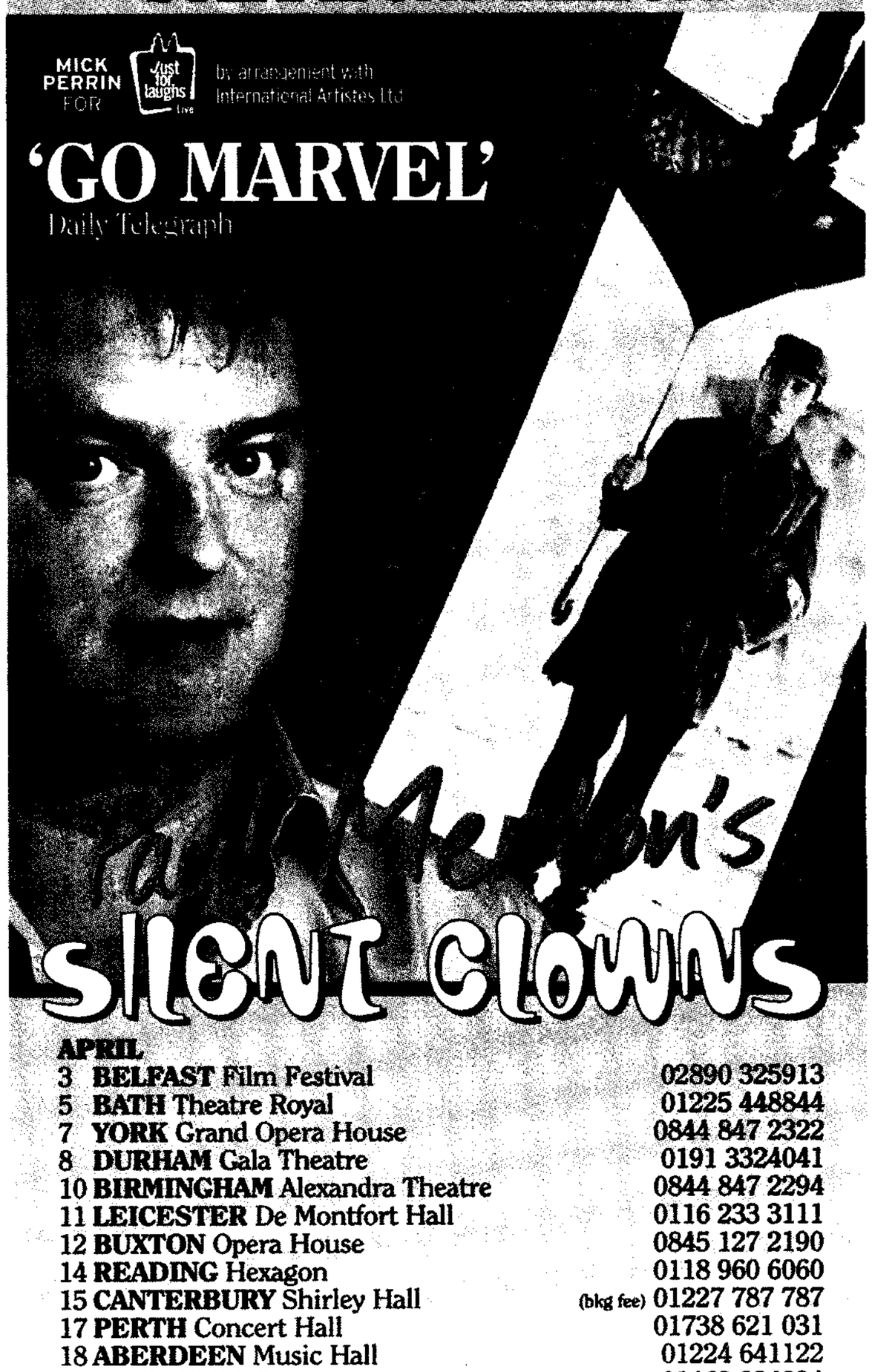

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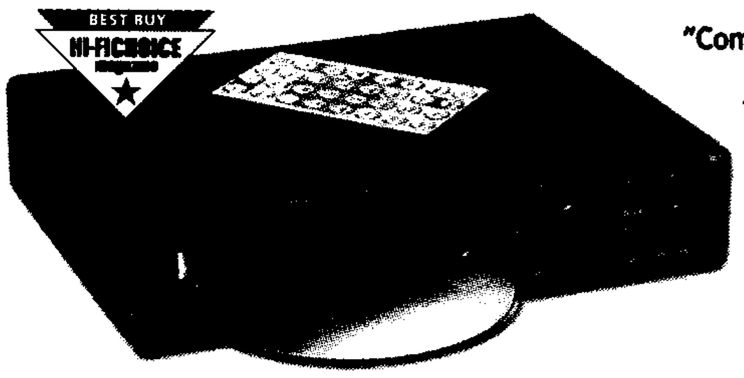

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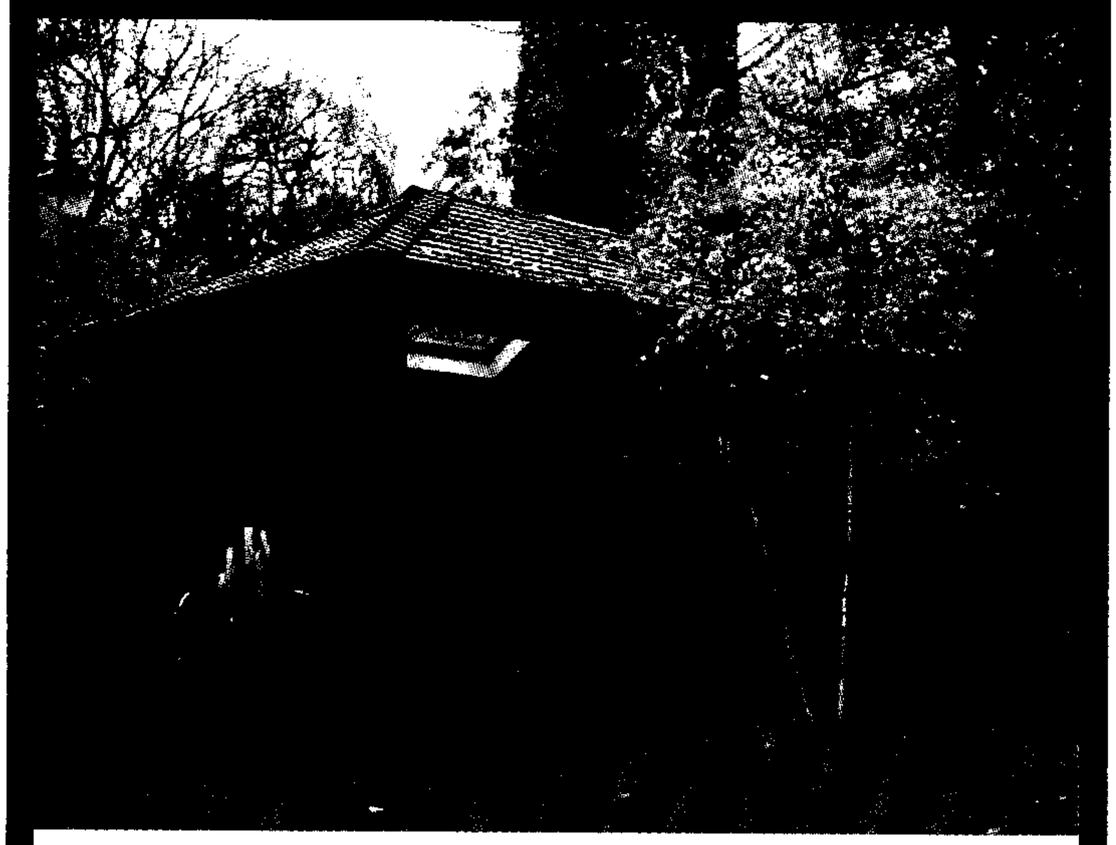

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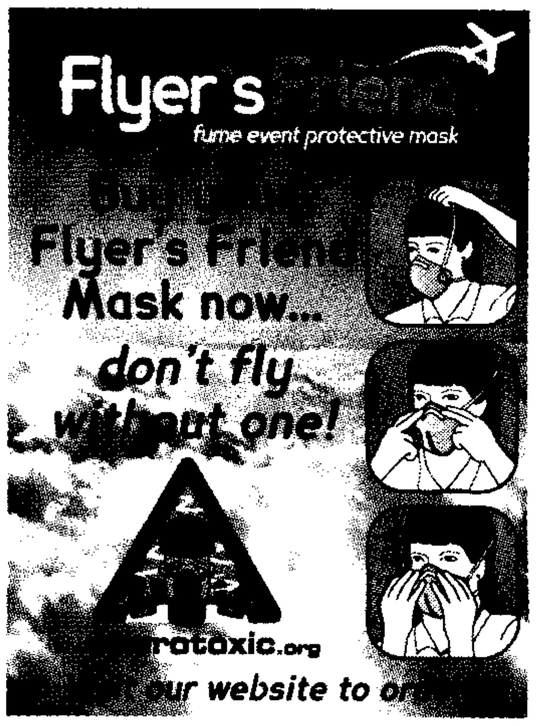

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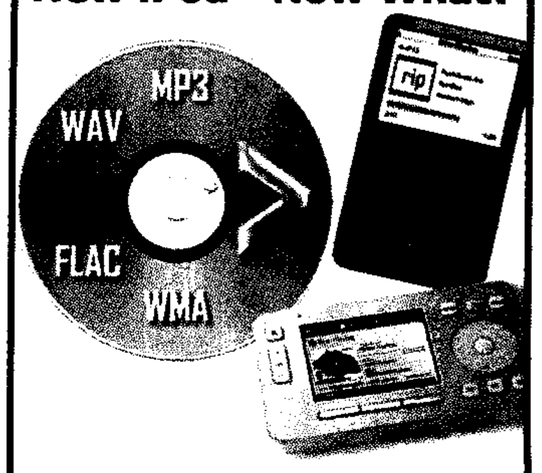

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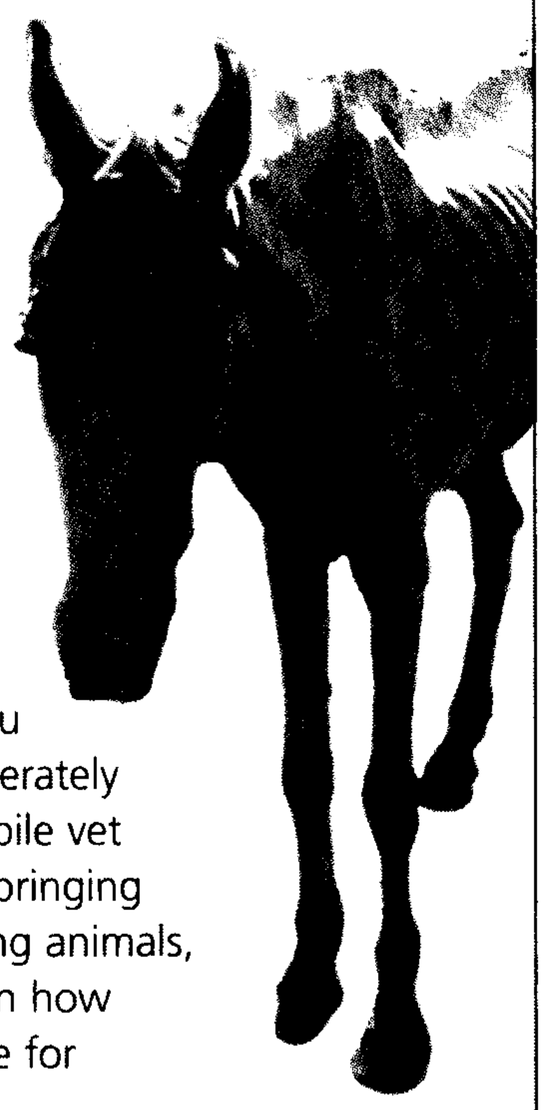

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Computer Novices! Do you agree with my Dad about the easiest way to learn to use your PC?

There are lots of books about how to use a PC. Page after page telling you all sorts of details. But they don't explain in a simple way how to do it. Well, give me two minutes and I'll tell you about two books that are different.

These books started off as some notes I wrote to help my Dad learn to use the PC. Believe me, he insisted they were clear and simple!

So I used **plain simple English** – techno-babble won't impress Dad! And where it was simpler to show him what to do, I used a picture of the screen, with arrows. It really shows you step by step what to do.

It's **not just Dad** who found them useful. Here are just a few of the dozens of comments we've had:

"One hour and I had learnt more than 3 months hard struggle had taught me." –JH

"Marvellously clear and helpful." – Carole Ashton

"My husband told me not to send for them. He said they would be like all the rest we've tried. How wrong he was!" – JGolding

"Wonderful service and books are so helpful and simple to understand." – S Unwin

But I don't have room here to explain all about them. So please write for full info on the books (and also about the 4 bonuses that come with each book). The infopack is free and I'll also include:

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